

Renewal Inspection Report

FRANCIS W. PARKER
CHARTER ESSENTIAL SCHOOL
DEVENS, MA

SchoolWorks

May 10-13, 2004

Table of Contents

| | Page |
|--|-------------|
| About the renewal process | 3 |
| How to read this report | 3 |
| Team members | 4 |
| Setting | 5 |
| Findings | 7 |
| Appendix A: Schedule of the visit | 27 |

About the renewal process and site visit report

Beginning in the spring of the third year of its charter (and ending August 1st 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 a bolded statement 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. Karen Laba, Director of Resource Development, SchoolWorks: Karen is a former middle and high school science teacher, preservice science teacher educator and supervisor. She manages school quality review projects for SchoolWorks including the design and implementation of customized accountability systems for charter and district schools.

Brent Stephens, Consultant, Schoolworks: Brent is a National Board Certified Spanish bilingual teacher with experience in Oakland, CA and Boston, MA. He is completing his doctorate in the Urban Superintendents Program at Harvard University.

Carole Forbes, Associate Examiner, Office of Educational Quality and Accountability: Carole has been an educator for 37 years and has served as a teacher, administrator for private and public schools, an adjunct faculty member, and Founder of a Faculty Development Teaching Effectiveness Center. She currently is an examiner for the Office of Educational Quality and Accountability, conducting district reviews.

Joseph Nigro: Associate Examiner, Office of Educational Quality and Accountability. Joe has been a secondary science teacher and administrator in public schools for more than 25 years. He currently consults in science teaching and conducts district evaluations for the MA Office of Educational Quality and Accountability.

SETTING

Francis Parker Charter School opened in 1995 in a windowless intelligence building on the site of the decommissioned Fort Devens Army base and moved to its present site which is a former elementary school in 2000. The school's mission continues to be to "move the child to the center of the educational process and to interrelate the several subjects of the curriculum so as to enhance their meaning for the child." Parker School is a member of the Coalition of Essential Schools and bases its academic and organizational decisions on the Ten Common Principles of Essential Schools. At the time of the renewal inspection, May 10-13, 2004, the school was completing its ninth year of operation, serving a population of 355 students in grades 7 through 12 from 65 surrounding communities.

The academic program at Parker follows the Ten Common Principles in its design and delivery. In abbreviated form, the Ten Principles are: (1) help adolescents use their minds well; (2) master a limited number of essential skills; (3) goals should apply to all students; (4) personalize teaching and learning; (5) governing metaphor is student as worker; (6) students should demonstrate competence in core knowledge; (7) stress the value of 'unassuming expectation'; (8) teachers are generalists first and specialists second; (9) eighty or fewer pupils per teacher, time for collective planning; and (10) model democratic processes, honor diversity and build on the strengths of the school's communities. In accordance with these principles, the academic program is organized around four key domains of knowledge: Math, Science and Technology (MST), Art and Humanities (AH), Health and Wellness (W) and Spanish (S). Within each domain, course content is structured over a two year sequence, with the core units of instruction developed in consultation with state and national standards in each discipline. A set of explicit performance criteria, the Criteria for Excellence, serves as the measure for all students to demonstrate mastery of each domain of knowledge. Students begin their academic program as members of "Division I" and progress through the content domains until mastery is demonstrated, allowing them to "gateway" to Division II, and finally to Division III. Most students complete the expectations of each division in two year's time; some demonstrate mastery earlier and some later. To date, every student at Parker, including the students requiring Individual Education Programs (IEPs) and extra academic support (Sec. 504), has completed the rigorous academic program and demonstrated mastery of essential skills and knowledge.

The method of instruction at Parker is also guided by the Ten Common Principles. Lessons are student centered and inquiry based, requiring original and creative problem solving in MST and thoughtful analysis and deliberation in AH. The common standard is "mastery" and students are advised to revise work products to meet the high standards of performance outlined in the Criteria for Excellence. In addition to the criteria for each subject area, students are expected to develop and master standards for "habits of learning" describing expectations for students to demonstrate inquiry, expression, critical thinking, collaboration, organization, attentiveness, involvement and reflection. Through its small class sizes and comprehensive advisory program, students have a number of adults who are dedicated to supporting them through mastery of the skills for success listed in the criteria.

A stable 12 member Board of Trustees guides the direction of Parker Charter Essential School. Five permanent founding board members are joined by three parent representatives, one faculty

representative, and two student representatives to provide support for and evaluate the principal, and engage in long range planning and serve on the finance subcommittee. The parent and faculty representatives serve three year terms, the student reps remain for one year. The stability of the board has contributed to the school's ability to maintain a constant focus on its guiding principles and student-centered goals. Similarly, the administration of Parker School has seen little turnover in the last three years. The administrative team consists of a principal, the school manager, a business manager, the director of student services, four domain leaders and three division coordinators. According to school records, over 80 percent of the teaching staff has returned each of the last two years, providing continuity for the students and the academic program. Among students, the attrition rate has dropped in the last charter term to an average 5 percent per year. With more students choosing to stay at Parker to graduation, the school faces a challenge of finding more space for the increased numbers in the Division III program.

The Regional Teachers Center housed at Parker Charter Essential School offers professional development services across a range of topics to educators within Massachusetts and beyond. Services include standard and customized visitation days at Parker, and a seminar series facilitated by Parker faculty and staff. During 2002-2003, seminar topics included portfolio assessment, graduation by exhibition, implementing an advisory program, and integrating arts and humanities. A new project now in its second year, the New Teachers Collaborative, is supported by a grant from the Gates Foundation and is coordinated by the Regional Teachers Center staff. The center serves as a teacher induction/ mentoring program for teachers new to the profession and/ or new to the Coalition of Essential Schools model. The New Teachers Collaborative hosts weekly all day sessions for the trainees who are full time employees at five schools in the region. The New Teachers Collaborative hosts regular meetings for the teaching interns in area schools. The program is designed to give novice teachers the support necessary to sustain their growth within the teaching profession.

The long range planning subcommittee of Parker Board of Trustees is investigating options for a permanent location and facility well suited to meet the needs of the academic program, the major challenge cited by the school for the next five years. Maintaining its programs and adherence to the common principles in a time of limited budgets is an additional challenge facing the school and its leaders. Parker has been sustained through previous challenges by the commitment and persistence of the larger community of parents, students, and trustees who, along with faculty, administrators and staff, have created a vibrant, growing, learning educational organization that carries out its mission with competence and confidence.

FINDINGS

To complete this report, the inspection team spent three and 1/2 days at Parker School, conducting classroom observations; interviewing students, teachers, administrators, parents, and members of the Board of Directors; and reviewing a wide range of documents related to the school's academic program.

While at Parker School, the inspection team observed classroom instruction in 21 classes from each of the school's academic domains. These observations included classes from each of the three Divisions in Math, Science, and Technology(MST); Arts and Humanities(AH); Wellness; and Spanish. In addition, team members spent an additional six hours conducting less formal, random visits throughout the school to increase the size of the sample of observed classrooms to well over 50.

The inspection team also conducted numerous interviews and focus groups with members of Parker School community. These interviews involved meetings with nine members of the school's leadership team, six members of the school's Board of Directors, and eight Parker parents. The team asked questions of various teacher groups, including each of the MST, AH, Wellness, and Spanish domains, as well as each domain's leader. Interviews were also conducted with the school's Principal, the Director of the Regional Teacher Center, the Director of Student Services, and the school's Guidance Counselor. Student focus groups drew from all three of the school's divisions, as well as two student government groups.

The inspection team conducted an extensive review of documents related to the school's academic program. The team analyzed MCAS and other standardized test data (Stanford 9) in reaching its conclusions about the effectiveness of the school's programs. Curriculum guides, internal assessments, student work samples and portfolios, portfolio scoring guides, class syllabi, teachers' mid-term reports, and class assignments from each domain were also considered by the team. Other documents reviewed by the team included a list of colleges that accepted Parker graduates for the coming school year; reports and evaluations from past years (Charter School Office, New England Association of Schools and Colleges); reports from the Board of Trustees (2003-2004); senior project proposals; new teacher support materials; sample teacher evaluations; and Regional Teacher Center dissemination materials.

From these observations, interviews and document reviews, the team developed the following findings about Parker Charter Essential School's programs and practices.

RENEWAL QUESTION 1: IS THE ACADEMIC PROGRAM A SUCCESS?

- 1. Parker Charter Essential School far exceeds the state's average MCAS performance at grade 10. Parker School students meet or exceed the average MCAS performance of its 5 largest sending districts for the 10th grade. Over time, each successive group**

of Parker School students has achieved proficiency (either Advanced or Proficient) at higher rates.

From the data presented below, the conclusion is that successive groups of Parker students are attaining proficiency at higher levels than their predecessors. The school’s efforts to provide opportunities for students to acquire mastery of the state-defined knowledge and skills measured by MCAS performance have resulted in almost 90 percent of tested students reaching the highest levels of achievement.

**Parker Charter Essential School: MCAS
Percent of Students in Each Category**

| Grade 10 | A | P | NI | F |
|-----------------|----------|----------|-----------|----------|
| ELA | | | | |
| 2001 | 23 | 48 | 20 | 9 |
| 2002 | 34 | 49 | 17 | 0 |
| 2003 | 53 | 42 | 5 | 0 |
| MATH | | | | |
| 2001 | 29 | 45 | 18 | 9 |
| 2002 | 39 | 39 | 22 | 0 |
| 2003 | 46 | 46 | 7 | 2 |

A = Advanced P = Proficient NI = Needs Improvement F = Failing

The chart above shows that, at the tenth grade level, successive groups of Parker students show increasing proficiency in both English language arts and mathematics. All Parker students tested in 2002 and 2003 passed the assessment, and 95 percent of the 2003 group achieved the proficient or advanced level of attainment. In mathematics, 92 percent of the students tested reached advanced and proficient. These rates far exceed the state average performance and match or exceed the performance of the districts sending the largest groups of students to Parker.

2003 Grade 10 MCAS: Comparison of Parker with Largest Sending Districts

| 2003 | Math | | | | ELA | | | |
|---------------|-------------|----------|-----------|----------|------------|----------|-----------|----------|
| | A | P | NI | F | A | P | NI | F |
| Parker | 46 | 46 | 7 | 2 | 53 | 42 | 5 | 0 |
| Acton | 62 | 24 | 10 | 4 | 52 | 40 | 6 | 2 |
| Ayer | 12 | 34 | 38 | 17 | 24 | 49 | 21 | 6 |
| Groton | 51 | 29 | 15 | 4 | 33 | 49 | 15 | 3 |

Successive groups of seventh graders show fairly stable performance on the grade 7 English Language Arts MCAS test. Students enroll at Parker Charter School at the seventh grade, so their performance reflects the results of both their prior schooling as well as that offered by Parker School.

| Grade 7 | A | P | NI | W |
|----------------|----------|----------|-----------|----------|
| ELA | | | | |
| 2001 | 14 | 70 | 14 | 3 |
| 2002 | 12 | 53 | 27 | 7 |
| 2003 | 14 | 70 | 14 | 2 |

The 2003 eighth graders at Parker performed equal to their predecessors on the mathematics MCAS at the advanced and proficient levels, but a larger percentage of the 2003 students scored in the warning/ failing classification.

| Grade 8 | A | P | NI | W |
|----------------|----------|----------|-----------|----------|
| MATH | | | | |
| 2001 | 18 | 39 | 38 | 5 |
| 2002 | 12 | 53 | 27 | 7 |
| 2003 | 14 | 50 | 21 | 14 |

Parker student performance over time has shown variable trends when compared to the national average. When the performance of students in the group is tracked from grade 7 to grade 9 on the norm referenced assessment, the Stanford 9, mathematics rankings have shown dramatic increases, ranging from gains of 11 NCEs to 7 NCEs for the four groups tracked. Reading and language rankings showed moderate declines among the same groups, while social studies remained relatively stable. In science, student groups declined in rank between seventh grade and ninth grade.

**Francis W. Parker Charter Essential School
Class of 2006 Stanford 9 Results, Longitudinal**

| n = 50 students in cohort | Grade 7, 2001 | Grade 9, 2003 |
|---------------------------|---------------|---------------|
| Total Reading (NCE) | 75.5 | 71.3 |
| Total Math (NCE) | 72.8 | 83.9 |
| Total Language (NCE) | 69.5 | 65.5 |
| Science | 76.4 | 69.8 |
| Social Studies | 70.3 | 70.9 |

Class of 2005

| n = 52 students in cohort | Grade 7, 2000 | Grade 9, 2002 |
|---------------------------|---------------|---------------|
| Total Reading (NCE) | 72 | 70 |
| Total Math (NCE) | 66 | 77 |
| Total Language (NCE) | 69 | 65 |
| Science | 73 | 68 |
| Social Studies | 71 | 70 |

Class of 2004

| n = 60 students in cohort | Grade 7, 1999 | Grade 9, 2001 |
|---------------------------|---------------|---------------|
| Total Reading (NCE) | 72 | 69 |
| Total Math (NCE) | 68 | 76 |
| Total Language (NCE) | 67 | 62 |
| Science | 70 | 66 |
| Social Studies | 68 | 71 |

Class of 2003

| n =52 students in cohort | Grade 7, 1998 | Grade 9, 2000 |
|--------------------------|---------------|---------------|
| Total Reading (NCE) | 75 | 69 |
| Total Math (NCE) | 70 | 77 |
| Total Language (NCE) | 68 | 62 |
| Science | 76 | 70 |
| Social Studies | 71 | 68 |

Overall, the students at Parker have attained high levels of performance as measured by both the state assessments and in comparison with a national average on the Stanford 9.

2. Parker Charter Essential School has clearly articulated a set of high standards (the Criteria for Excellence) that are understood by students, teachers, and parents. The school is consistent in holding students to these standards, and all curricula, instruction, and assessment promotes students' progress towards these standards.

Parker School standards establish high expectations for all students with respect to both content and process. Its curriculum asks all students to engage with rigor in considering the important ideas and concepts identified by the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks across a range of subjects. The school's Criteria for Excellence, a set of statements about the habits and processes employed by effective learners, define for students and staff the skills the school considers essential. These skills emphasize the importance of independent inquiry, of reading with a variety of comprehension and analytic strategies, of approaching problems in math and science effectively, and of writing and speaking to communicate with a variety of audiences. These process skills reflect both national and state standards for student learning, and are evident in Parker curriculum guides, rubrics, and progress reports examined by the inspection team, as well as in students' and teachers' daily language. For example:

- ❑ In one MST class, students were challenged to construct a geodesic dome using common household materials. Students were guided through the project by brief but clear directions, as well as a performance rubric related to two of Parker's Criteria for Excellence: Mathematical Problem-Solving and Communication. The assignment required that students engage in and demonstrate proficiency in several mathematical concepts included in the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. The lesson was supported by instruction that emphasized student problem-solving, and was itself a form of assessment. As it considered this lesson, the team noted how MST teachers had considered curriculum, instruction, and assessment in an integrated way, and that students were experiencing this mathematical content, its instruction, and its assessment in a way that consistently promoted their own ability to pose and solve problems.
- ❑ In another class, Division III Physics, students were challenged to perform a series of experiments that would expand their recent derivation of the formula for the buoyancy of an object in a fluid. As an option for students, the assignment could be completed for the satisfaction of the Division's Systems Thinking portfolio requirement. Much like the lesson on geodesic domes, almost all of the cognitive demand was placed on the students. Although the teacher provided students with clear directions for performing the

experiments, students were left to interpret their findings in light of the concepts, theories, and formulas they had already encountered. Classroom instruction took the form of facilitation: the teacher made sure that materials were available, and prompted students' thinking with open-ended questions. Here again, the curriculum objectives, the instruction, and the demonstration of knowledge worked in a highly integrated manner.

In interviews with members of the inspection team, Parker students described this challenging academic environment in ways that suggest they appreciate their growing capacity and independence. As they advance through the school's divisions, several students described their work as becoming "more challenging, but also more fun." When asked to elaborate on this point, they described the school's systematic emphasis on students' ability to define their own projects, select methods for learning about their interests, and demonstrate their newly acquired knowledge through writing, presentations, and demonstrations. Complementing the students' perspective, teachers and administrators described the extensive set of criteria that are in place both explicitly and implicitly in guiding students toward meaningful and productive learning experiences, whether student selected or teacher defined.

The school's emphasis on teaching the habits of effective learners is also evident in many students' descriptions of their out-of-class activities. The team interviewed students who said they had been proactive and deliberate in selecting portfolio projects in areas in which they felt they had fewer academic strengths, as well students who had elected to participate in academic clubs outside their areas of interest. For these students, their choices represented efforts to make themselves more rounded and effective members of the community, and they credited the school for helping them understand the significance of engaging in personally challenging tasks. The inspectors also noted several examples of a desire by students to define their work in the most ambitious terms. In one AH (Arts and Humanities) class, students asked their teachers for help in defining projects that would help them learn a new skill; in another MST (Math, Science, and Technology) class, students talked with team members about selecting a particularly challenging physics task for inclusion in their senior portfolios.

Parker School's *Criteria for Excellence* apply to all students, and become more rigorous and sophisticated as students advance through each of the school's divisions. The criteria are defined for the broad range of academic subject areas required of all students: reading, writing, Spanish, mathematical problem solving, mathematical communication, scientific investigation, systems thinking and mathematical modeling, wellness, artistic expression, listening, oral presentation and technology use. In addition, the set of criteria for excellence in "habits of mind" define the attitudes and behaviors that characterize an active learner. The activities that staff members undertake to structure the sequence of content and skills within their particular subject are linked directly to specific criteria. Proposals from students for projects require explicit definition of the criteria elements against which the project will be assessed.

The school is clear in its aim to assist all students to achieve at high levels, and all classes make active and evident use of the Criteria for Excellence, including those students with special educational needs. Parker administration and staff has been particularly thoughtful in considering how students' skills and knowledge should build on prior school experience, and each division has clearly defined expectations that build on those of previous years. For example, the

inspection team discovered in its review of Division I, II, and III Gateway requirements that the expectations related to Problem Solving – one part of the school’s Criteria for Excellence – become increasingly sophisticated as students advance from Division I to Division III. Students at each level have the opportunity to consider and practice the full set of skills the school values from the earliest stages of their career at Parker, but the expectations related to these skills become increasingly sophisticated as students mature.

As an additional form of support for students of all ability levels, the school offers test preparation and more traditional practice-based instruction on Wednesdays. These classes emphasize more familiar approaches to writing, mathematics, and science – and represent one significant modification of the school’s instructional approach to ensure that all students are adequately prepared for the MCAS. The inspection team had the opportunity to observe instruction in these classes during one day of its visit; these classes appeared to be well-aligned with the Massachusetts Frameworks and, while very different from the style of instruction offered during the remainder of the week, appeared to be of sufficient substance to help students with the more memory-based aspects of their learning.

In addition, teachers at Parker describe their efforts to support students with special needs as taking place very early in the curriculum planning process. In their regular domain meetings, teachers have access to and consider students’ Personal Learning Plans (PLP), 504 accommodations, and Individual Education Programs (IEP). Teachers also take into account their own knowledge of individual students (which, they explain, is based on frequent and rigorous classroom assessments), information from student advisories, and meetings with incoming students’ previous teachers. Inspection team members corroborated that each of these sources of information is readily available to teachers at Parker, and class lessons and curriculum units were visibly influenced by the deliberations described by Parker teachers.

3. Curriculum, instruction, and assessment at Parker School are designed and refined as an integrated system that works effectively to build on individual students’ interests, needs, and abilities to move them to a common set of expectations.

Parker School has created a thoughtful and well-integrated set of curricula, instructional practices, and assessments. Each component of the school’s academic program functions in support of the others, contributing to and reinforcing students’ knowledge of content and the learning process.

Curriculum materials at Parker School are developed by teachers in reference to national and state standards. Based on the team’s review of curriculum materials, interviews with teachers, and classroom observations, this process carefully considers the ideas and concepts students are expected to master, as well as the ways in which students will experience the academic content, and the opportunities they will have to demonstrate and deepen their knowledge. Because of Parker School’s division of academic content into “domains” and “divisions”, curriculum planning appeared to the team to be well-coordinated and sequenced. For example, the math and science curricula for Division II (each taught as part of the Domain called Mathematics, Science, and Technology [MST]), were planned by teachers to continually build on previously explored

content. During the first year of Division 2 MST, students explored concepts related to measurement, exponents, solid geometry, similar and right triangles, systems of equations, and inequalities. During the second year of study in Division II MST, students went on to work with logic, transformational geometry, tessellation, quadratics, and correlation. In order to meet the requirements of the Division, students need to have demonstrated their skills in each of these areas, and on the school's Criteria for Excellence – the set of thinking and performance skills that appear in every area of the school's academic program. When asked about how these units were planned, teachers described a process in which curriculum, instruction, and assessment were considered at the same time. By defining the skills and concepts that students are expected to know, and by describing the measures by which students will demonstrate their knowledge, teachers derive the instructional methods that will best support students to achieve these goals. As it inspected a large number of curriculum guides and lessons plans in each division and domain, the inspection team concurred that curricular goals, teaching strategies, and assessment tasks are highly aligned.

RENEWAL QUESTION 2: IS THE SCHOOL A VIABLE ORGANIZATION?

1. Leadership at Parker School consistently models the intellectual goals of the school community and nurtures the academic, social, and professional learning of all its members.

Organizationally, Parker Charter Essential School employs a distributed model of leadership. Administrators, clerical associates, domain leaders, division coordinators, board members, teachers, students, and parents actively display a sense of ownership and stewardship of the school. The actions of individuals in each of these roles reflect the *Ten Common Principles of Essential Schools*, the core of the school's mission, contributing to a strong and coherent organization.

Parker Charter Essential School has had two principals in its history and the current principal has served for five years in that role. The stability of central leadership has reinforced the consistency of the school's strategies for bringing its mission to life. Administrative decisions are checked against the *Ten Common Principles of Essential Schools*, just as academic decisions are compared to these ten guidelines. Administrative decisions related to the academic program are developed in collaboration with appropriate groups of faculty members and often with students. For example, the yearly "essential question" is chosen by the full school population following a "brainstorming" period in which all can contribute ideas on a poster paper covered wall in the school hallway. Contributions are sorted and sifted by a group of faculty and staff for the questions with the greatest potential for application across the range of academic fields. The final set of choices is voted on by teachers, students and staff members and announced on the final day of school to allow planning to begin over the summer break. Other academic changes are decided by the principal in collaboration with the appropriate division (grade level grouping) or domain (subject area) members. For example, the decision to structure upper division (grade 11 and 12) courses as topic-defined programs of study (e.g., Calculus, Chemistry, Forensics, Computer Science) required deliberation by both domain and division leaders and staff members

as well as input from current students and alumni. The decision making process is orchestrated by the principal, with an eye at each point to the Common Principles on which the school is founded.

Teachers also describe themselves as leaders in Parker School and see their work as making a valuable contribution to the school community. They meet regularly in subject area groups to plan and assess curricula, in grade level and subject area teams to gauge the quality of student work, and in formal and informal collections to identify professional development needs. As questions or problems arise, teachers are regularly called on by administrators or teacher-leaders to provide input about the school's academic and social programs. Teachers are supported in this work by a teaching schedule that allows them two full hours of common planning time each day, as well as an extended daily schedule in which they regularly meet with their colleagues. Teachers make use of a one hour-long block each week to meet within domains reviewing student work and coordinating academic content within and across grade levels. Teachers also make use of regularly scheduled meetings to participate in "Critical Friend" groups. According to descriptions provided to the team by teachers and domain leaders, these groups support teachers in improving their teaching practice with colleagues, and frequently involve sharing outside professional development experiences, texts, and visits to other classrooms. Teachers also meet for three weeks in the summer months to plan and assess curriculum, and teachers new to the school are afforded a three-day orientation. Teachers also benefit from a weekly professional development period. All of these scheduled meetings take place in an environment that the team came to characterize as highly collaborative; teachers were regularly observed in meaningful conversations with their peers about students, curricula, and assessments.

The inspectors confirmed teachers' descriptions of the distributed leadership at the school in its review of curriculum materials (where teachers had clearly collaborated to develop curricula), in students' portfolios (where teachers worked together to assess student learning), and in course syllabi (where decisions to focus on single-subject courses in Domain III were clearly the result of frequent and substantive group discussion). The team noted in its conversations with teachers and in its observations of teacher meetings little evidence of the hierarchical relationships among teachers and administrators that can sometimes limit meaningful participation by staff. Parker teachers were highly knowledgeable about the decisions that have affected the school's academic program, were clearly invested in presenting their work to the inspection team, and did so with a very visible measure of personal and professional pride.

As members of Parker community and in student organizations such as the Justice Committee and Community Congress, students described their participation as an important contribution to the ongoing maintenance and improvement of the school. Parker students play an active role in defining the norms and policies of the school. Through the Justice Committee and Community Congress, students are actively engaged in fostering an atmosphere of respect and in creating and considering the rules of the school. The inspection team interviewed members of each of these organizations and recorded frequent examples of conflicts and issues that had been identified and resolved with active student participation. For example, students on the Justice Committee described having intervened in at least three disputes between students during the current school year. Similarly, students in the Community Congress discussed their recent efforts to revise the school's constitution to better reflect changes that have occurred in the last three years. The

inspection team felt that these examples were of sufficient substance, and involved sufficiently large numbers of students, to include students in this section about school leadership.

The active role of students and teachers at Parker School in a broad range of leadership activities is the product of the school's long-standing commitment to building a democratic learning environment as defined in Common Principle 10, "It [the school] should model democratic practices that involve all who are directly affected by the school." In its earliest years, Parker's Board of Trustees was thoughtful in its consideration of the academic and social development of the school's students, and put in place the norms and structures that would allow students to understand, articulate, and act on their individual and collective aspirations. The choice to limit the student load of each teacher, for example, is a major element that allows Parker to retain the personal attention to every child's learning that is its hallmark. The Board was similarly thoughtful about supporting the professional growth of its staff, and enacted its commitments to teacher leadership in the form of hiring guidelines, preserving extended meeting times, professional guidance, and an ongoing respect for the staff's decisions. Current members describe their leadership as a form of assistance; according to members of the Board interviewed by the inspection team, their main role is to "keep teachers and administrators focused on results", rather than the short-term issues that may distract the school from pursuing its performance goals.

The team noted the unique and important contribution of the school's Principal, administrative staff, and other administrators to the sense of collective ownership it encountered at Parker School. In its conversations and observations at the school, the team found the principal to be open and receptive to the concerns of students and staff, and noted that she consistently demonstrated her respect and praise for the unique contributions of each member of Parker community. Members of the Board of Trustees, parents, staff, and students described her actions to support the school's mission in the same positive terms. She regularly attends domain meetings, is active in teacher evaluation, and is a highly visible member of the school community. The team concluded that her intense and wholehearted commitment to the Ten Common Principles plays an important part in assuring that administrative adjustments to programs and practices will maintain the school's faithfulness to its core mission.

2. Parker School is a place of trusting and respectful relationships and members of the school community value each individual, encourage academic excellence, and foster a willingness to take intellectual risks.

Parker Charter Essential School knows and supports the unique learning needs of each of its students. Teachers at Parker School are consistent in their efforts to create and foster relationships with their students, and classes observed by the inspectors were almost uniformly characterized by an atmosphere of support, empathy, and high expectations. In one Arts and Humanities class observed by a member of the team, students were encouraged by their teachers to compare a debate they had just completed about the recent role of the U.S. Supreme Court in considering issues of free speech to past debates about other topics. The exchange centered on the quality of students' thinking in each debate, and was supported by the teacher's ability to recall past classes, probe students' thinking with follow-up questions, and the presence of an oral

presentation rubric that had been applied to both performances. In another AH class, students were challenged by their teacher to consider their biases as they conducted research on other area high schools. Like the other class, team members considered the exchange to be cognitively demanding, but students were well-supported by the teacher's concern for the students' feelings about visiting a more traditional high-school, and for protecting the experiences of the subjects in the class's study.

In focus groups and informal conversations, students demonstrate an understanding of the intellectual strengths and curiosities of their teachers, and describe the encouragement they receive from their teachers to develop their own thinking. Students address their teachers by their first names which, though informal and some would worry too casual, represented the lowering of barriers, resulting in students who felt their teachers were accessible and approachable. Team members were able to observe frequent one-on-one conversations in class between teachers and students because the visit occurred during the completion of final course projects. Most conversations addressed the criteria for achieving "gateway" status (the transition between divisions) or the skills and content required for "meeting" course expectations. The team found that Parker teachers ask a great deal of their students, and that the personal relationships developed between teacher and learner served to foster students' willingness to ask questions, monitor their own progress, and define their own meaningful learning goals.

Beyond each classroom, Parker School has implemented a number of programs to support students' individual and academic growth. As a first and vital step in supporting the success of all students, the school holds all students – including those with identified special needs -- to the same set of exacting performance and content standards, expecting that all students satisfy the portfolio requirements associated with each division in order to be promoted. In this context of high expectations for all students, the school has a number of well-defined and acceptable pathways by which a student may demonstrate mastery of the school's standards. First, students benefit from feedback on assignments and projects that is detailed and highly diagnostic, and are afforded multiple opportunities to revise and refine their work based on this feedback. Second, students are encouraged to develop their thinking and research skills through projects of their own design. Similarly, Parker students make regular, guided choices about how to demonstrate their mastery, selecting between a wide range of assignments to assemble a portfolio that will demonstrate how they understand and can enact the school's Criteria for Excellence. Third, students progress towards a comprehensive demonstration of their skills and knowledge – what the school calls a "gateway" - at their own rate. Though most students "gateway" at the end of a two-year period (the school's documents show that 85% of students gateway within two years), students consult with their teachers to decide whether to advance or delay these milestones according to their own development. As primary mechanisms for supporting all students to achieve at high levels, Parker School's efforts exceed those of most other educational organizations as measured by their own internal standards as well as by external measures.

In addition to the support for all students to reach a uniform set of expectations, the school is deliberate in its support of students with documented learning needs. Special Education students receive additional support from two certified Special Education teachers, and these students' overall development is tracked by the school's Student Service Coordinator. In describing the support the school provides to students with learning disabilities, the Coordinator first cites the

high level of support available to all students within the regular classroom: explicit rubrics for evaluating work, frequent and specific feedback from teachers, multiple opportunities to revise work in order to satisfy the school's Criteria for Excellence, portfolio exhibitions, highly diagnostic assessments, and explicit attention to thinking and study skills. Beyond these things, students with documented learning needs are given additional time to complete assignments, either at school or at home. They receive additional support services from two Special Education certified teachers. Teachers take an active role in considering these students' particular needs as they plan curricula and assessments, and each domain has a Special Education liaison. In addition, the school works to move all seniors from IEPs to 504 plans for the purpose of carrying forward their academic goals and accommodations into a college setting.

Parker School students also benefit from the relationships that come from their participation in a weekly advisory. During this period, students meet with the member of Parker staff who has been assigned as their advisor to discuss any academic, personal, or social issue that they may find challenging. Student advisees regularly develop long-term relationships with their advisors, which many students who spoke with the inspectors described as critical to their success, happiness, and sense of belonging. Advisory groups build a sense of belonging among students by planning a variety of social events (generally involving food provided by willing parent volunteers) as well as service projects to support a group-selected charity. During the inspection, one advisory group washed cars to raise funds for The Heifer Project.

In addition, Parker students are supported to understand and contribute to both the school and to the larger world. The inspection team observed a large number of these opportunities, including:

- **Senior Projects:** Seniors at Parker School design, research, and present a demanding senior project that combines a range of academic skills with experience in a real-world setting. Senior projects at Parker frequently involve internships, substantial volunteer experiences, or travel to other countries, and are evaluated by a diverse panel of instructors, peers, and community members. During the team's three-day visit, it viewed a complete senior project exhibition on videotape and witnessed another in person. Each of these experiences placed significant demand on the academic and social skills of the students, and were of substantial value in helping each student reflect on and grow from his or her senior project experience.
- **Service Projects:** Some students described their participation in service projects related to a range of social causes. For example, several students told the inspection team that they had launched an awareness campaign related to breast cancer; still others related their experiences as organizers of a local branch of the state campaign against drunk drivers. To support this first project, students wrote a grant to Parker Essential Fund, a support organization and fund raising group for the school; in the second case, students wrote grants to the state to fund their service project.
- **Clubs:** Parker students participate in social and academic clubs designed to round out their experiences in the school. The inspection team was particularly impressed with the number of students who told the team that they had joined a club for the purpose of gaining skills and experiences in areas that were especially challenging to them. For example, several students said that they had joined the Math Club because they were weak in the subject, and others had joined sports clubs that focused on activities they had

not yet experienced. The team interpreted these students' actions as evidence that the school's efforts to encourage students' self-assessment and goal-setting has had a positive effect on students' behaviors.

- **Expert Speakers and Field Trips:** Parker students benefit from frequent visits to the school by experts, and from trips that are meaningfully related to the content of their classes. In one class visited by the team, students were preparing for a research trip to a local high school as part of a class on reform in American education.
- **Wellness Domain:** Students at Parker School also participate in the Wellness curriculum, a comprehensive sequence of personal, emotional, and health topics. In addition to participating in a range of physical activities, students engage in study and discussion about physical safety, drug and alcohol abuse, eating disorders, and other issues relevant to the development of healthy life choices.
- **Transition Counselor:** As students enter their junior year, they begin to work in group and one-on-one sessions with the school's Transition Counselor to develop an understanding of the college admissions process, to develop a list of colleges and vocational programs to match their personal and career interests, and to strategize about completing admissions tests and essays. These efforts frequently take students off campus, and are cited by many Parker students and teachers as an important part of students' transition to the next phase of their education.
- **Community Congress:** Through the Community Congress, Parker students have the opportunity to participate in the formation and revision of the school's policies and rules. Members of the Community Congress, who are elected by their peers within advisory groups, work with the school's student body and administration to define issues, research options and propose policy changes, and lobby the school's constituents to ensure that their work is widely accepted. Many members of the Community Congress who participated in interviews with the inspection team claimed that their experiences had helped them to better understand the legislative process, had contributed to their understanding of the importance of consultation and communication, and would play some part in their career decisions.
- **Justice Committee:** Students from each of the school's advisory groups may also be elected to sit on the Justice Committee and assist in the hearing and resolution of issues and complaints between members of the school community. Student from the Justice Committee told the inspection team that they had learned important mediation skills, and that their experiences on the Committee would also be useful to them in whatever field they chose to pursue as Parker graduates.

3. **Parker School has been deliberate in creating systems for collecting internal and external feedback about its effectiveness, and has sustained a professional culture that is receptive to the information these systems provide. All of this allows the school to continually refine its initial decisions about how to enact its mission, and plays a key role in the ongoing improvement of student learning.**

As with the organization of curriculum and leadership, Parker Charter Essential School's system for assessing the quality of its programs works as a finely integrated system that supports the ongoing refinement of the school's initial decisions about enacting its mission. As a result of the

visit, the inspection team recognized that the school's assessment system serves an essential role in ensuring that the school's curriculum, instruction, and student assessment strategies are continually informed by the most recent information about their effect on student learning.

One of the systems for collecting information on school performance is the teacher evaluation process. Teachers are evaluated using a locally developed instrument that is closely aligned to the school's values about teacher reflection, effective instruction, and professional growth and contributions to the school community. In its design, Parker teacher evaluation instrument also serves as a model and a parallel for the type of learning opportunities that Parker students are regularly afforded. In the inspection team's conversations with Parker teachers, most teachers said that they were visited regularly by their domain leader or the principal (between 4-6 times per year). Teachers in the first few years of their careers told the team that they had been given specific feedback on their instruction at least five times since the beginning of the current academic year.

Another internal assessment tool collects input on the advisory program. Parker School conducts regular reviews of the effectiveness of the advisory program generally using interview and survey data from students and alumni, similar information from parents, as well as anecdotal evidence collected by teachers. Much like its assessment of other programs, Parker relies on a combination of formal and informal data to assess the adherence of its advisory program to the school's guiding principles.

The inspection team noted that many Parker teachers seemed familiar with basic principles of data collection and analysis. For example, teachers regularly cited examples of phenomena they believed to be occurring at the school, and made conjectures about possible patterns that these examples may represent. In addition, inspection team members frequently heard staff refer to the validity and reliability of their data sources. Overall, the team concluded that these 'habits of mind' – the ability of the school's staff to use discrete bits of evidence to create questions for further research or develop hypotheses about the effectiveness of the school's programs – were emblematic of a well-developed professional culture that makes effective use of data from many sources. That so many teachers referred to their work in terms of ongoing research, and that teachers so regularly meet to compare and develop these ideas is, in effect, the equivalent of a deliberate and consistent evaluation process.

In addition to collecting and reviewing information from these informal sources, teachers and administrators are clearly knowledgeable about the results of the standardized tests taken by Parker students. Though not the centerpiece of the school's efforts to evaluate and improve its programs, this data has been used by the school to refine its focus on student writing and to concentrate to a greater degree on strictly subject-matter expertise in Division III mathematics courses. Additional feedback from the successful accreditation process completed in 2000 has contributed to the school's understanding of its strengths and areas for improvement as seen by a team of external evaluators. Reflection and careful consideration of each source of program assessment data has contributed to the school's ongoing strength in service to its students.

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

- 1. Parker mission – “to move the child to the center of the education process, and to interrelate the several subjects of the curriculum in such a way as to enhance their meaning for the child” - is the driving force behind the programs, practices and attitudes that define the school.**

The mission of Parker Charter Essential School is its driving force: its values are evident in the words and actions of its members and in each of the school’s practices and structures. Throughout its time at Parker School, the inspection team noted that students, teachers, parents, and administrators made constant reference to the school’s mission. Students spoke at length about the importance of each individual’s intellectual and social development, and in not one instance did the inspection team observe student behavior contrary to these values. Similarly, teachers’ descriptions of their work at Parker were interlaced with the language of the mission; in particular, teachers discussed the advantages to students’ learning in a curriculum that emphasizes “depth over breadth” and fosters growth at each child’s rate. Parents spoke about the maturation of their children at Parker, and attributed this progress to the school’s efforts to situate student learning in an environment of mutual respect and democratic practice. Parker administrators, some of whom are founding members of the school, are also deeply invested in realizing the school’s mission.

In coming to its conclusions about the school’s mission, the inspection team observed the mission as it exists in the daily life of the school, a more pervasive influence on the school’s students and staff than just a written document. Only very rarely did any member of Parker community quote the school’s mission statement or refer directly to any printed materials related to it. Instead, the ideas and values of Parker mission were actively and visibly embedded in the daily operation of the school, from the relationships between teachers and students to the spirit of participation and respect that characterized each class.

Because it is linked to the *Ten Common Principles*, Parker mission is sufficiently elaborated that structures, practices, and behaviors are easily imagined and more fully realized by members of its community. Though the inspection team found evidence of the enactment of the Ten Principles, several examples especially bear out this point:

- **Personalization:** Parker School has been deliberate and thoughtful about creating structures to ensure that each student enjoys a range of close and supportive relationships with staff and administration. The twice daily and longer weekly advisory periods with a single staff member, low class sizes, assessment practices that encourage substantial commentary on student work by teachers, and flexible class assignments are several of a long list of routines by which the school has enacted its commitment to a personalized educational experience for its students.
- **Less is more, depth over coverage:** This principle is evident in all of the course syllabi developed by the school. Whether expressed as fewer curriculum units per year, or in lessons plans that encourage students to derive larger meanings from a set of facts or observations, the influence of this principle was obvious at Parker School.

- **Demonstration of mastery:** An especially unique feature of Parker School, students enjoy frequent opportunities to demonstrate what they have learned. Through class projects that often engage students in the tasks performed by professionals in a wide variety of fields; student-assembled portfolios for the demonstration of mastery of the school’s “Criteria for Excellence”; or “Gateway” exhibitions that are assessed by a panel of teachers, students, and others; Parker students are held to high academic standards and assessed in ways that afford staff a genuine and wide-ranging view of their accomplishments.
 - **A tone of decency and trust:** The inspection team was exposed to examples of this Common Principle in all of its interactions at Parker School. During classroom observations, teachers were respectful of students and their inclinations, and gave clear value to each one’s intellectual contributions. Also evident in the team’s visits to classrooms, students were generous with the intellectual risks taken by their peers, and by all accounts, appeared to genuinely appreciate these contributions. Administrators appeared to have very little investment in the power afforded by their positions, but were visibly concerned with ensuring that all students and staff had consistent opportunities to express themselves and contribute to the ongoing improvement of the community.
- 2. A large proportion of Parker students reach the school’s challenging promotion standards within each two-year cycle. Reduced attrition and student reflections indicate increased student engagement in the academic program over time.**

Parker School has established two explicit objectives for the performance of its students: (1) that all students will master essential skills and develop sound “habits of mind”, and (2) that all students will be actively engaged in learning and demonstrating mastery. With respect to the first of these goals, the inspection team reviewed data maintained by the school on the percentage of students who “gateway” from one division to another, as well as student progress reports written by each teachers and student portfolios, which are assembled by each student for the purpose of demonstrating mastery in select areas of the school’s “Criteria for Excellence.” All of these data sources confirm the school’s assertion that students are actively engaged in the school’s curriculum and achieving promotion within the timelines established by the school. Importantly, all students at Parker demonstrate that they have mastered the school’s essential skills, though a small proportion of the total do so in a period slightly longer than two years.

To further review the second of these student performance objectives, that students will be actively engaged in the curriculum, the inspection team relied on students’ responses during group interviews, as well as written comments provided by students in the introductory letters that accompany their portfolios. Generally, students comment that they have become more autonomous and self-monitoring in their approach to school, and reflected on having developed important skills during their approximately two years in each division. For example, one Division I student described her development in the Arts and Humanities domain in this way: “I have improved my critical thinking, a skill that I was not even familiar with when I came to Parker” (Student AH Gateway portfolio). Another described her progress in this way: “I know I’m not who I am when I came to Parker, or even who I was in the first few months of school this year. I approach things differently. I try to be positive and learn something even when I’m not having the best day.... People who know me may have heard me say this over and over, but

I've just changed so much, and I'm proud of myself for trying to improve" (MST Division I Gateway Portfolio).

In classroom observations and group interviews, the inspection team encountered students who had similar comments about their growth - and who conceived of this growth both in terms of their mastery of subject matter and in terms of their increasing ability to set goals, assess the effectiveness of their own effort, and become increasingly more sophisticated learners.

3. Parker School has achieved all of its school performance goals: Relationships between and among students and teachers show a high level of trust and respect; Parker teachers are generally skillful "facilitators of learning" who encourage students to develop and answer their own questions; and Parker students participate in a curriculum that is challenging and engaging.

Parker Accountability Plan school performance goals have been met over the course of the school's current charter term. As it has described in other sections of this report, the inspection team found that interactions at Parker School are characterized by respect and caring. The team saw frequent examples students taking intellectual risks, and where these risks are largely respected and admired by peers. Teachers exhibited a consistent confidence in the ability of each student to learn and perform at high levels, and provided very effective academic and moral support towards this end. In keeping with the school's mission, teachers described themselves as 'coaches' in interviews with the inspection team: they described how they assist students in defining their own objectives, in understanding the merits and deficiencies of their work, and in becoming more effective in their efforts. The school was wrapped students' classroom experiences with a thoughtful set of social and extra-curricular activities that serve to enhance each student's awareness of herself and her world.

Parker Charter Essential School has developed a challenging and engaging interdisciplinary curriculum that builds on the tone of "unanxious expectation" in all of its classrooms. Students are challenged to perform work that is well-beyond the scope of traditional high school curricula, and to consider problems as they are encountered in the "real world" beyond school. Student research projects are guided by teachers who model and adopt a researcher perspective in their own professional practice. Exhibitions take place in front of a panel of educators and community members who are deeply knowledgeable about each student's topic, and that is deeply invested in pushing students further in their academic and moral reasoning. In one exhibition about a student's volunteer work in Ecuador observed by the inspection team, panel members asked the student to consider her own privilege as an American in her dealings with the local populace. When it was clear that the student had not sufficiently grasped the implications of her answer, the panel encouraged her reflection with additional related questions. Throughout the interaction, the panel was clearly supportive of the student, but equally determined to use the exhibition as an opportunity for genuine growth and reflection.

In considering the quality of these Parker practices, the inspection team can state confidently that Parker School has met and far exceeded the set of organizational goals set out in its Accountability Plan.

4. Parker School has created a multi-faceted system for sharing its learnings with other educators that contributes to the profession and supports the school's own professional growth while balancing its commitment to sustaining its programs.

The board, administration, and teachers of Parker School have shown a sustained commitment to serving the professional community outside of Devens. They have established or participated in a range of networks and organizations to help others view and take away the lessons they have learned over the last nine years. And importantly, they have done these things without comprising the quality of their efforts to assess and refine their own programs, or to bring into the community new and beneficial ideas.

To meet their goals related to dissemination, Parker School has developed and maintains its own website and hosts visits from other schools and groups through the Regional Teachers Center. Parker works with the Center for Collaborative Education (CCE) and the New England Small Schools Network (NESSN), organizations that provide expertise and distribute materials in keeping with Parker's philosophy. The school has also been involved with Leominster as the district develops a small-schools initiative for its high school. In addition, the principal of Parker School is an active mentor to other principals, and the school contributes to the growing base of knowledge about student-centered high schools through the Coalition of Essential Schools. Members of the Board of Directors also noted that two teachers from Parker School have left to begin schools based on similar principles, and that these new schools represent important contributions by Parker School to the understanding within and beyond the education community of effective schooling practices.

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

1. Parker School's newest accountability plan builds and expands on its past plans; it maintains high and rigorous expectations for student learning and maintains its current systems for the ongoing refinement of its programs.

As part of its renewal application, Parker School builds and expands on its past plans to propose a rigorous set of goals for students' academic achievement, its organization's viability, and fidelity to its original charter. The school sets as a goal that "students should learn to use their minds well and master a limited number of essential skills and areas of knowledge." This goal rests on a number of internal and external measures, including the number of students who satisfy requirements for promotion to each new Division, the number of students who pass the 10th grade MCAS, and the number of students who maintain their standing on a national norm-referenced test. The inspection team noted the enhanced 'measurability' of each of the new measures and their coherence and alignment with the school's mission and guiding principles. The proposed plan targets embody the school's belief in supporting all students to achieve at the highest levels. The school's promotion requirements (called a "Gateway") are particularly well-

defined, and are based on an especially thoughtful synthesis of the body of research on the skills and dispositions required of 21st century graduates.

In further defining the academic skills Parker School hopes to nurture among its students, the school has defined a set of measures for a second goal: “The governing practical metaphor of the school should be student-as-worker; students will know how to learn and thus teach themselves.” The completion of this goal will rely heavily on the school’s ability to conceive of and maintain curricula and instruction that places students at their center. Based on its observations and interviews, the inspection team concluded that the school has succeeded admirably on this count, and that it is well-positioned to sustain its focus on this goal through the next charter term. As currently written and regularly revised, each domain’s curricula assumes and supports a high level of independence from students. Teachers establish relationships with the students in their classes that are at once collegial and intellectually demanding. Assessments ask students to engage with academic content that approaches the intellectual expectations of many college-level classes, and to be aware of the ongoing development of important process skills related to inquiry, problem-solving, persuasion, collaboration, and presentation. Student exhibitions take place in an environment of support, trust, and high expectations. These aspects of the school’s program – each developed with very evident care by the school’s Board, administration, and faculty – make Parker goal related to its students’ thinking and learning skills especially meaningful.

In the area of organizational viability, Parker’s Board of Trustees sets for itself several important goals. First, the Board will develop and achieve annual leadership goals that reflect the school’s mission. Second, the Board will maintain an accurate record of its income and expenses, and will ensure that the school remains in sound financial condition. Based on its review of the Board’s past leadership goals, as well as the school’s budget, the inspection team concluded that Parker community is likely to achieve this latest iteration of its organizational viability goals.

Parker School seeks to continue the faithful implementation of its charter by maintaining a tone of “unanxious expectation, of trust, and of decency.” Current surveys of parents and students suggest that the school has achieved exactly this tone, and there is strong expectation that the current composition of the staff, the school’s curriculum, and the school’s leadership will sustain these practices into the coming years.

At the same time, Parker School’s Regional Teacher Center has played a key role in helping to disseminate the school’s practices and learnings to others interested in pursuing similar reforms at the high school level. Parker teachers have led workshops and hosted visitors from a large number of states in tours of the school, and have offered assistance to other organizations seeking to personalize their large high schools. As the school moves forward, the inspection team anticipates that the Regional Teachers Center will continue to make valuable contributions to the profession, and will succeed to enriching the set of resources currently available to the school. In addition, the school’s early efforts to develop a New Teachers Collaborative for the preparation of novice teachers have similar promise. The inspection team believes that beginning teachers will benefit from having modeled for them the quality teaching and professional development that are common at Parker.

2. Parker School is in a strong position to achieve the goals in its next charter term: The school's Board of Trustees and administration are stable and of a common mind; its teachers and administrators are competent, skilled and enthusiastic in their work; and its finances are robust and sound.

Throughout this report, the inspection team has described the various aspects of Parker Charter Essential School that make it an outstanding educational environment for its students. All of these aspects, which the team concluded fit together to form a rational and effective system for improving student learning, enhancing professional practice, and enriching contemporary efforts to reform secondary education, are the result of the school's skilled implementation of a well-elaborated and highly focused mission. The inspection team concurs with the school's assessment of its current position: it is appropriate (and an impressive accomplishment) that the school is principally concerned with making its accomplishments more permanent in the form of a larger permanent building, and that it maintains its current attention to making ongoing refinements to its core programs.

To arrive at this stage of its development, Parker School has designed, implemented, and refined many processes that stand as examples in the field of education. The school supports its teachers with a thoughtful and well-aligned teacher evaluation instrument, and is consistent in providing teachers with many hours of in-class feedback, meaningful professional discourse, opportunities to learn outside the school, and chances to teach others about the school's methods. It knows and has articulated what it seeks in its new teachers, and supports new hires with a full induction process that includes orientation meetings, a mentor teacher, and in-class support. Responding to the issue of incentives that other schools have found immovable, Parker has developed a salary schedule that promotes the acquisition of important professional competencies. The school has elicited the support of the parent community, and has found ways to make its involvement genuine and compelling. Student engagement in government and clubs is particularly robust, and the school has been careful to ensure that students' efforts in these areas have important and tangible effects on their own intellectual development, as well as the school's day-to-day functioning. Most important, Parker School has developed a highly engaging, challenging curriculum. Students in the school are the daily beneficiaries of this effort, and are brought into continual contact with the problems that make life rich and stimulating, and have genuine opportunities to develop and explore their solutions.

APPENDIX A: SCHEDULE OF THE RENEWAL INSPECTION VISIT

Parker Charter Essential School

May 10-13,2004:

Monday, May 10, 2004

| | Team Member A | Team Member B | Team Member C | Team Member D |
|---------------------|--|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| 12:00 | Hotel Check In | | | |
| 12:00 – 2:30 | Team meeting, introductions, overview of process, tasks | | | |
| 3:00-4:00 | Team Meets with School Leaders Location: School | | | |
| 4:00-6:00 | Initial Team Meeting at School, (location – team workroom) | | | |
| 6:00 | Team Dinner | | | |

Tuesday, May 11, 2004

| | Team Member A | Team Member B | Team Member C | Team Member D |
|--|--|-------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 7:30 – 7:45 | Arrival, setup, building tour | | | |
| 7:45 – 8:15 | | | Feedback to School Leaders | |
| 8:15 – 9:15 | Meeting with Board Representatives | | | |
| | Div I | Div III | Div I | Div II |
| 9:15 – 9:45 Block 2.1 | AH1—Martha & Clay Rm 16 | MST 3 -- John, Rm 27 | AH 1 – Emma & Alyssa, RM15 | AH 2 – Anthony, Rm 21 |
| 9:50 – 10:45 Block 2.2 | AH 1 – Matt & Tassia Rm 13 | AH 3 – Frank Rm 3B | AH3 – Deb, Rm 27 | AH2 – David, Rm 18 |
| 10:45 – 10:55 | whole school break | | | |
| 10:55 – 11:50 Block 3.1 | MST1 -- Dan & Gena, Rm 17 | MST3 – Judy, Rm 20 | MST1 -- Ann & Mitt, Rm 12 | MST2 – Tiffany & Ann, Rm 22 |
| 11:55 – 12:50 Block 3.2 | MST 1 – Jen & Tanya Rm 14 | AH3 – March, Rm 6 | MST 2 – Mel & Dawn, Rm 23 | Document review |
| 12:50 – 1:20 | Lunch | | | |
| 1:20 – 2:15 Block 1.1 | W1 -- Laura, Aud | Document review | MST 3 – Melissa & Amy, Rm 28 | MST 2 – Heidi & Dina, Rm 24 |
| 2:20 – 3:15 Block 1.2 | SP1 – Damara, Rm. 15 | SS Becky, Rm 28 | W1 – Alan, Aud | |
| 2:45 – 3:30 | | Parent Focus Group | | Parent Focus group |
| 3:30 – 4:00 | Note writing; evidence sorting, Team Work Room | | | |
| 4:00 -6:00 | Team Moderation Session | | | |
| 6:00 | Team Dinner | | | |

Wednesday, May 12, 2004

| | Team Member A | Team Member B | Team Member C | Team Member D |
|---------------------------------------|--|--|---|--|
| 7:30-8:00 | Arrival | | | |
| 8:00 – 8:30 | | | Feedback to school leaders | |
| 8:50 – 9:50 Choice () | 9:00 – 9:50 Student focus group | Interview Director of Teacher Center (Frank) | 9:00 – 9:50 Student focus group | Interview Director of Student Services (Laura) |
| 9:55 – 10:50 Academic | Division II | Division I | Division III | Division I |
| 10:50 – 11:00 | Break | | | |
| 11:00 – 11:55 Academic | Interview Spanish Domain Leader (Deb) | Division I | Division II | Division III |
| 12:00 -12:30 | Lunch | | | |
| 12:30 – 1:30 Advisory | Document review | Interview Student Judicial Committee | Interview Student Judicial Committee | Document review |
| 2:00 - 4:00 Faculty | 2:00 – 2:45 AH Focus Group | 2:00 – 2:45 MST Focus Group | 2:00 -2:45 AH Focus Group | 2:00 -2:45 MST Focus Group |
| 3:00-3:30 | Note writing; evidence sorting, Team Work Room | | | |
| 3:30-6:00 | Team Moderation Session | | | |
| 6:00 | Team Dinner | | | |

Thursday, May 13, 2004:

| | Team Member A | Team Member B | Team Member C | Team Member D |
|------------------------------------|---|----------------------|----------------------------|----------------------|
| 7:30-8:00 | Arrival | | | |
| 8:00 – 8:30 | | | Feedback to School Leaders | |
| 8:30 -8:45 | Community meeting | | | |
| 8:45 – 9:45 Block 3.1 | | | | |
| 9:50 – 10:45 Block 3.2 | | | | |
| 10:45 – 10:55 | Break | | | |
| 10:55 – 11:50 Block 1.1 | | | | |
| 12:00 – 1:00 | Team lunch, debrief | | | |
| 12:30-3:30 | Team Moderation | | | |
| (3:30-4:30- Tentative) | Oral Presentation of Findings to School Leaders | | | |
| 4:30-5:30 | Team debrief, evaluations, departure | | | |

Interviews to be scheduled as of 5/5/04: MST Domain leader, Transition Counselor, Division Leaders