

Renewal Inspection Report

Atlantis Charter School
Fall River, Massachusetts

SchoolWorks rks

June 6-9, 1999

SETTING

The city of Fall River, located in Bristol County fifty miles south of Boston along the Taunton River, was once one of the world's leading textile manufacturing centers. Known as "Spindle City" in the latter part of the Nineteenth Century, Fall River was home to more than 120 mills with over four million spindles and employing upwards of 30,000 people. This prosperity drew immigrants from Great Britain, Portugal, and Canada. After the peak of prosperity during World War I, Fall River suffered in the 1920's from the move south by many textile manufacturers and a devastating fire in the central business district. By 1930, the city declared bankruptcy; and the state took over city finances for the next decade.

Today, Fall River's industrial base includes chemical operations, electrical and food products, and a few remaining garment and textile industries. Tourism plays a part in the local economy. The city boasts the largest factory outlet district in New England, and a World War II memorial, Battleship Cove, exhibits a number of American naval warships at the State Pier.

Atlantis Charter School serves approximately 500 students in grades K-8. The school sits high on a hillside overlooking the waters of the Taunton River. Housed in a former convent, Atlantis Charter School serves children, families, and the greater Fall River community through educational, family, and community service programming.

Inspection Team

Susan Miller Barker, Lead Inspector

Ms. Barker is a doctoral candidate in Administration, Planning, and Social Policy at Harvard University. She has just completed an internship in the Superintendent's Office in Charlotte, North Carolina. Prior to her doctoral studies, Ms. Barker worked in education policy for the Hudson Institute, serving as the Assistant Director of the Modern Red Schoolhouse, one of the New American Schools' whole school reform designs. She began her career as an elementary school teacher, technology coordinator, and science curriculum project specialist in Indianapolis, Indiana.

Ledyard McFadden, Inspector

Ledyard McFadden is the President of SchoolWorks. He was the founding Director of Operations for City on a Hill Charter School, where he developed the school's management structure and budgeting processes. Prior to his work at City on a Hill, he was a founder and teacher of the Bridge School, a school-within-a-school at Chelsea High School in Massachusetts. Mr. McFadden has taught English as a second language at Chelsea High School and at both an elementary and high school in Costa Rica. He has also given

workshops on fiscal management for charter schools in Massachusetts, New Jersey, and the District of Columbia. He presently serves on the Outcomes Committee for the Boys and Girls Club of Boston.

Karen Laba, Inspector

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

Maureen R. Iaccarino, Inspector

Maureen Iaccarino has been a teacher in the Marlborough Public Schools for over a decade, during which time she was the 1995 Marlborough School Department Teacher of the Year. She was also recognized as a nominee for the Sallie Mae First-Year Teacher of the Year Award and the Jiffy Lube Salute to Excellence in Education Award. Ms. Iaccarino's areas of expertise are early childhood education and special needs. During her tenure in the Marlborough Public Schools, she has helped to develop and integrate the preschool program, design curriculum, and provide leadership in interdisciplinary team collaboration.

Stephen Lake, Inspector and Monitor

Stephen Lake has taught in a wide variety of schools in England. Originally qualified as a secondary school mathematics teacher, he has taught all age groups from three years old to sixty-three years old. Mr. Lake has been a principal of both local authority and grant-maintained elementary schools in England. At present, he is a principal of Full Circle, a British inspection company that evaluates over 150 schools annually under the British OFSTED inspection system.

Renewal Findings

IS THE ACADEMIC PROGRAM A SUCCESS?

- 1. Scores on external assessments have shown progress, but have fallen in comparison with national measures.**

External assessments, administered by Atlantis Charter School, include the MCAS, the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, and the Stanford Achievement Tests, Ninth Edition. Third-grade performance on the reading section of the Iowa Test of Basic Skills over the last three academic years shows two-thirds of ACS students performing at Proficient or Advanced reading levels. Baseline scores for the 1998 administration of the MCAS exceeded those of the local school district in English and science. Though changes in the Stanford Nine test battery and the availability of comparison with urban counterparts complicate the longitudinal analysis, Atlantis Charter School students gained in grade-level equivalency but, at the same three-year period, lost ground relative to national comparisons. In an effort to increase student performance on all measures, ACS has focused administrative, instructional, and evaluation efforts on defining academic standards. Additionally, ACS restructured its administration and provided professional development to equip teachers with the knowledge and tools required to assist students in achieving academic success.

Narrative References: 8, 10, 11,12, 13, 14,15,16,17

- 2. The school has made acceptable progress towards its stated goal of defining a coherent curriculum and complementary assessments. Complete implementation, evaluation, and refinement of both curriculum and assessments have yet to occur.**

Ongoing development of curriculum goals and objectives, linked to learning standards and assessments grounded in the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks, has begun to clarify expectations for student performance and promotion at Atlantis Charter School. The introduction of learning standards, checklists of student performance goals, and a nascent portfolio system hold promise for increasing the rigor of the curriculum and raising the level of student performance. Implementation varies from classroom to classroom and is not clearly articulated in K-8. However, the stated performance goals are a solid first step in providing teachers, students, and parents with clear objectives for teaching and learning. The work of further articulating the curriculum, creating well-defined assessments, and linking both to student learning standards still remains.

Narrative References: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 28, 29, 30, 32

- 3. In contrast to its general progress in curriculum development, the school, as an organization, has not addressed the academic needs of the seventh and eighth grades. The necessity for comprehensive planning, curriculum development, and staffing is now acute in this area.**

Classroom standards and expectations of acceptable achievement in core academic areas are observably lower in grades seven and eight than in earlier grade levels. While the curriculum is based on the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks, in practice both the content and its presentation to students lack the rigor necessary to promote academic success. A lack of command of content area knowledge on the part of faculty and insufficient classroom resources result in students being minimally exposed to demanding material and opportunities for in-depth inquiry.

Narrative References: 27, 31, 33, 45

- 4. The establishment of a coherent special education program has dramatically improved services to individual children.**

Current evaluations, individual education plans, and supplemental daily instruction support all special education students at Atlantis Charter School. A new, full-time special education administrator and an expanded special education team have established this refined system of service delivery. ACS had determined that the previous inclusion model of special education was not meeting the academic needs of students. This led to the creation of a blended service model. In addition to receiving instruction in core academic areas from classroom teachers, students now receive additional instruction via daily pull-out sessions from special education teachers. This 'two layer' approach assists students in attaining the same curricular standards as non-special education students.

Narrative References: 23, 24, 25, 26

IS THE SCHOOL A VIABLE ORGANIZATION?

- 1. The school has the broad support of parents, as demonstrated by the rapid growth of the enrollment and the large waiting list. Many parents expressed satisfaction with the school's educational program.**

Complications arising from the short window of time between acceptance of the charter application and the opening of school precipitated a dip in enrollment during Atlantis' first year of operation. Since that time, enrollment at ACS has grown from 214 in its first year to 500 in its fourth year. Further stability is indicated by the school's waiting list that boasts over 400 children eager to enter ACS. Parents report that the school has lived up to their expectations of providing a welcoming atmosphere, where parent communication with teachers is a high priority.

Narrative References: 66, 67, 68, 69

- 2. The Family Learning Center is highly valued, and the many activities are well attended. The Kid's Cove program successfully meets an important need in the school community.**

The Family Learning Center is a strong tie binding the Atlantis Charter School to the community, families, students, and staff. Through a myriad of initiatives, the Family Learning Center reaches its goal of "encouraging community members to work together as a team in helping children to be successful." FLC activities nurture families and the broader community of Fall River. This meets the school's goal of "embracing the entire community and virtually all its human service provider institutions." The work of the full-time FLC Director, a full-time school nurse, and a staff focused on both reaching out to and inviting in the community provides important structures that promote student success. Most important, Kid's Cove, the Family Learning Center's extended day program, provides academically focused before and after school care for ACS students. Participants also contribute to Atlantis Charter School and the broader Fall River community through a variety of service projects.

Narrative References: 19, 20, 22, 23

- 3. The school is fortunate to have a dedicated, committed staff. Teachers conduct after-school activities and social development programs that extend academic opportunities for the children of Atlantis Charter School beyond the regular school day.**

The commitment of the Atlantis staff is evidenced by the respectful and nurturing relationships visible between students and teachers. Parents and board members credit teacher commitment and ingenuity for keeping 'the school going' during the difficulties faced in Atlantis's start-up year. In addition to academic duties, Atlantis teachers participate in realizing the mission of the school by providing leadership and assistance in many community-based and Family Learning Center initiatives. Teachers conduct evening family-oriented activities and community and peer service projects that extend learning opportunities for all members of the Atlantis Charter School community beyond normal school hours.

Narrative References: 19, 20, 21, 23

- 4. The present professional development program is inadequate. While it encourages teachers to pursue their individual interests, it is not systematic. It does not address the educational needs of the students or the pedagogical and content needs of teachers.**

The current professional development system at Atlantis Charter School consists of three components: individual professional development goals, school-wide staff development opportunities, and performance evaluation. While all of these are necessary components of an effective professional development system, each component needs to be closely linked to the others, and all of them need to be strategically organized to improve the rigor of curricular content and the quality of teaching. The school's continuing work in defining student performance goals provides a first step in the journey of creating and operating a strategic professional development plan that meets the academic needs of students.

Narrative References: 44, 45, 46, 63, 64, 65

- 5. Teachers willingly attend courses and conferences throughout the year. However, professional development is not based on a systematic evaluation of school and student needs. As a result, there is not a cohesive approach to the implementation of the curriculum.**

Attainment on professional development at Atlantis Charter School has increased over the first four years of its charter. The quick start-up time the school experienced in its first year necessitated a focus on the basics. During the first year, the majority of professional development time was dedicated to selecting materials, developing reporting mechanisms, and writing the school's initial accountability plan. Subsequently, the school has endeavored to provide both individualized and group activities for teachers. In addition to long and short term staff workshops on literacy and mathematics, teachers identify professional development needs on an individual basis and attend workshops and conferences to address these needs.

Presently, there are no consistent connections between professional development activities and identified student needs. However, some beginning connections can be found. For instance, when the school identified mathematics as an area of critical concern, three teachers attended a Chicago Everyday Mathematics workshop. One additional session on Everyday Mathematics was provided to the entire staff. On the other hand, professional development linked to student performance in English/language arts, science, and history is not as clearly in evidence.

While portfolios have been introduced to all ACS students, professional development to define common expectations and assessment standards across all grades and content areas has yet to occur. In the 1998-1999 school year, ACS promoted one of its lead teachers to the position of Curriculum Coordinator. It is hoped this position will provide focus to the overall professional development program and link all activities to increasing student attainment of the curriculum goals and objectives identified by ACS staff over the last three years.

Narrative References: 46, 63, 64, 65

- 6. The governance of the school is unclear. In practice, roles and responsibilities are not sufficiently defined. The decision-making process is restricted by a lack of effective procedures for gathering and disseminating information.**

During the course of ACS's first four years, three different administrative structures have been in place. Currently, ACS's chief administrative position is Superintendent. Three additional administrators—a Principal, a Director of Business and Technology, and a Family Learning Center Director—support the Superintendent. Alignment of the duties associated with each position is unclear, both in written job descriptions and in practice.

Narrative References: 52, 55, 56, 57

- 7. The Board does not provide appropriate leadership to the school. The board lacks a strategic overview or detailed effective plan for the future and has not established an effective dialogue with either staff or parents.**

The Atlantis Charter School Board has yet to establish effective mechanisms to inform and communicate its policy and decision-making processes. Staff, administrators, and parents express significant frustration at a board decision-making process that remains oblique to most members of the ACS community. Currently, the Superintendent of ACS acts as the sole conduit for the flow of information between the board and the school community. This structure has produced a situation where board processes seem disconnected from issues and concerns expressed by staff, administrators, and parents. For instance, there are unexplained delays in purchase approvals and technology implementation. There is a scarcity of direct contact between the Board and ACS's Principal and Family Learning Center Director. Furthermore, the Board has not responded to written requests made to it by various staff members.

Despite the statement by one board member that the board's role is to 'look at the future,' no detailed strategic plan or overview linking academic, organizational, financial, community, and professional development activities exists. The school's application for charter renewal outlines strategies for the development of such a plan and suggests that the anticipated partnership with Brown University's Education Alliance will result in internal analysis and evaluation of curriculum and standards. Whether or not this partnership will produce a strategic plan linking educational goals to the leadership and organizational structures critical to academic success remains unclear.

Narrative References: 51, 52, 53, 54, 59

8. The board is not accessible to the staff or parents and, as a result, many lack confidence in its ability to manage the school effectively.

The Atlantis Charter School Board has expanded from its original configuration to include two parent members. However, teachers, some administrative staff, and parents relay frustration over the lack of contact with the board. In addition to an undefined board appointment process, board decision-making procedures are not shared with the ACS community. While board meetings do occur approximately once a month, they are not scheduled on a consistent basis. Teachers and administrators at Atlantis Charter School report that they receive little to no notification of when board meetings are scheduled and that they have limited access to the minutes of ACS board meetings. Issues, concerns, and requests for information are relayed through the Principal to the Superintendent to the board. Response from the board is slow, and no context or explanation for the decisions made is provided. The result is much confusion on the part of teachers, parents, and administrators below the Superintendent level as to the process and pace of board decision-making.

Narrative References: 53, 54

HAS THE SCHOOL BEEN FAITHFUL TO THE TERMS OF ITS CHARTER?

1. Progress toward the establishment of the Family Learning Center is a proud achievement of the Atlantis Charter School.

All members of the Atlantis Charter School community applaud the work of the Family Learning Center and recognize the Center as vital to the continued growth of the school. Benefiting from committed and effective leadership, the Family Learning Center provides a wide range of support. From such education-oriented workshops as read-a-thons, book writing contests, hands-on science, creative writing for adults to money management workshops, self-defense, and CPR, Atlantis families have opportunities to support their children and enrich their family lives. In addition to serving as home to the Parent School Council, the FLC hosts hundreds of children and their parents at storytelling festivals, movie nights, academic celebrations, and community dances. Providing an excellent example of school/community linkages, the FLC organizes career shadowing days that introduce eight grade students to Fall River's economic community.

Narrative References: 19, 20, 22

2. Atlantis Charter School's commitment to community service learning is evidenced by the growing number of opportunities for students to participate in the life of the community.

A vital component in the development of Atlantis students is community service learning. To quote an ACS parent, "community involvement is encouraged and celebrated" in a multitude of ways. Students have adopted residents of a nearby senior care facility as 'grandparents' and sustained their commitment to sharing both school work and life experience with these valued members of the Fall River community. Students also support a battered women's shelter and have sponsored community memorials for the shooting tragedy in Jonesboro, Arkansas. Students at all grade levels learn the value of contributing to one's community by using their talents and abilities to reach out to Fall River.

Narrative References: 21

3. Atlantis Charter School has not made adequate progress toward its goal of becoming a high-tech learning environment. Existing resources are unnecessarily under-utilized and inaccessible.

Acquisition of over forty networked computers located in mini-labs, offices, classrooms, and the ACS library is the school's preliminary step in addressing its objective of providing a technology-rich learning environment for students. However, use of the computers by students and staff, is severely limited by non-functional network, Internet access, and printing systems. In the absence of these systems, hardware sits fallow, and software packages sit unopened on office shelves. While much of the technology has been in place for close to two years, it remains inaccessible to a majority of students and faculty. No articulated plan to remedy the technology problem exists. Contrasting views regarding the use of technology in education are held by some members of the Atlantis Charter School Board and the staff. While members of the board and administrative staff discuss plans to address infrastructure, hardware, and software needs, ACS has yet to create a plan detailing how technology will be used to enhance student attainment of academic and community service learning objectives.

Narrative References: 9, 38, 49, 54

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

Note: Given the prospective nature of this renewal question, no references to the school narrative are included.

- 1. The school's relationship with the Education Alliance at Brown University is a promising step toward creating a culture in which decisions are based upon objective information and shared openly with the school's community.**

In conjunction with the Education Alliance staff, ACS faculty and administrators plan to create a School Assessment Team, which will lead the school's efforts in analyzing school-based data (statistical information, interviews, surveys, focus groups, and student work). Once this data analysis is complete, the School Assessment team will identify significant issues facing the school. ACS faculty will work with the Education Alliance to create implementation plans that define objectives and action steps connected to the school's goals. This partnership holds the potential to provide clear strategies for improvement and the ability to implement those strategies as ACS strives to better its governance, instruction, assessment, and ultimately the academic performance of its students.

- 2. Plans to expand to a high school within the next charter term will first require a resolution of current governance issues and the adoption of a comprehensive strategic planning.**

Though many parents expressed interest in continuing the expansion of Atlantis Charter School to ninth grade for the 1999-2000 school year, the ACS Board of Trustees wisely decided to delay expansion plans for the next three academic years. The prospect of providing education at all grade levels is daunting. The challenges of providing the necessary standards, curriculum, instruction, and assessment at the high school level are particularly formidable. Expansion of Atlantis Charter School will require that the school engage in thoughtful strategic planning and that issues with the existing governance structure be addressed.

- 3. The success of the school during the term of its next charter will require the establishment of a shared vision understood by all—parents, faculty, and the board.**

Atlantis Charter School faces the difficult challenge of creating a clear and common understanding of student achievement goals, school governance goals, and goals for parent and community involvement. Atlantis Charter School's goals are written in its 1999 Accountability Plan but are not commonly understood and adhered to in practice by the Board of Trustees, the administration, the faculty, and the parents. The school's growth and success depend in large part on its ability to create a shared vision and a shared understanding of how that vision will be achieved.

I. Student

Atlantis Charter School expects each student to develop a “high level of competency in English language arts, mathematics, science and technology, social studies, the arts, and health.” In addition to competency in these areas, ACS strives to encourage students to think creatively, critically, and independently. Finally, the school expects students to exhibit responsibility, discipline, and a commitment to community service. While achievement in core academic areas has yet to reach uniformly high levels, the students of Atlantis Charter school are actively engaged in community service activities that promote their sense of responsibility and commitment to community.

ACADEMIC STANDARDS AND GOALS

- 1 Atlantis Charter School continues to examine and refine the standards by which it judges student achievement. In the summers of 1997 and 1998, a core group of fifteen teachers and administrators worked to develop a framework of standards and competencies for student performance. The resulting documents, a few hundred pages in length, list standards and competencies in the core academic areas (English language arts, mathematics, history and social science, and science), as well as in health, physical education, music and art. ACS standards and competencies borrow heavily from the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. They are not yet completed for all grade levels. Mathematics standards and competencies address grade levels K-8. History and science standards and competencies exist in grades K-8. However, English language arts standards and competencies only address K-6.
- 2 Structured in a checklist format, the school's framework of standards for each grade is designed to serve as a reporting mechanism for both the school's new portfolio system and student academic progress reports. Content identified in each discipline is drawn from the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks, often containing language that is similar or verbatim to that found in state frameworks.
- 3 The English language arts standards are organized into five major learning areas, or strands: language; literature; composition/grammar; life study/handwriting/media; and comprehension. In their current form, they do not clearly articulate what students should know and be able to do at each grade level. Many standards are restated from one grade level to the next with no increase in expectations. For example, a standard asking students to identify characters in a story or literature selection appears at each grade level 1-4. To date, the school has not developed English language arts standards for grades seven and eight.
- 4 Atlantis Charter School history and social science standards utilize the same strands found in the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks but do not reflect the Massachusetts Core Knowledge outlines, which are used by the state to assess student achievement on the MCAS. The school's history and social science standards require additional examination as a limited amount of United States history

is included at present. World history, a component of the MCAS, is absent from the ACS frameworks, thus limiting student exposure to and acquisition of content necessary to succeed on state assessment measures.

5 Atlantis Charter School mathematics standards and competencies are organized into five categories or strands:

1. Number Sense/Numeration
2. Patterns, Relations, Functions
3. Geometry/Measurement
4. Probability and Statistics
5. Estimation and Problem Solving.

The Massachusetts Mathematics Curriculum Frameworks include the final category, Estimation and Problem Solving, as a universal element in the first four strands. ACS has chosen to feature Estimation and Problem Solving in a separate category. The ACS mathematics standards occur in two distinct structures, one for K-4 and a second for grades 5-8.

6 The school's standards and competencies do not yet include grade level performance statements in a common structure from grades K-8. Further development of ACS standards and competencies is required to produce manageable and clearly measurable goals for student academic success. The number of standards and competencies identified for each grade level reflects thoughtful and considered work on the part of ACS faculty; however, such large numbers of standards and competencies make alignment with curriculum and assessment measures a challenging task. For example, at the fourth-grade level students and teachers are responsible for 286 standards in four core disciplines. Clarification and refinement of the documents will diminish the number and redundancy of standards that currently exist in all subject areas.

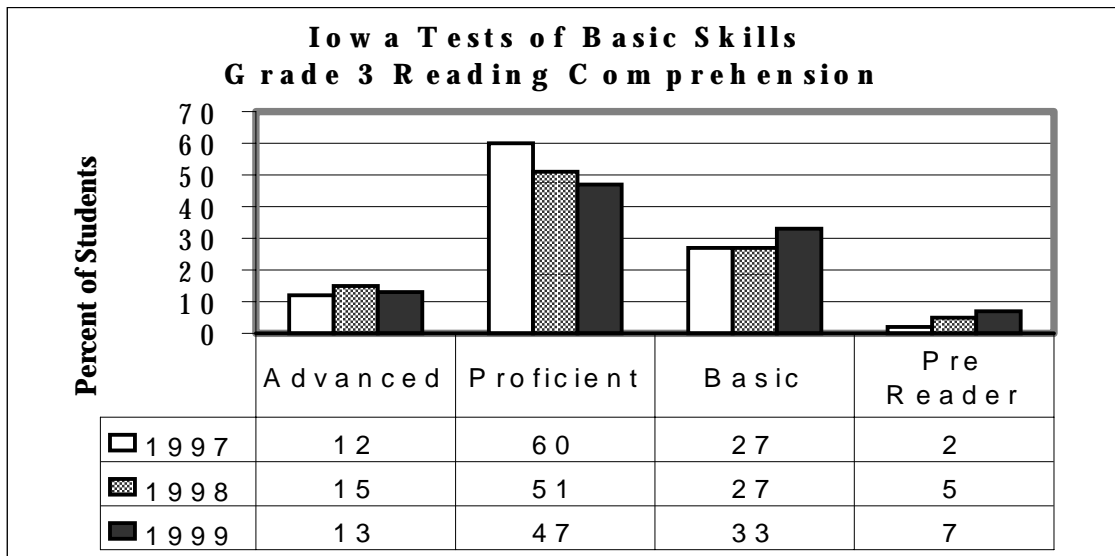
7 Work toward clarifying standards and competencies will continue in the summer of 1999. Through a grant from the Pioneer Institute, another core group of ACS teachers and administrators will work with a national standards consultant whose expertise centers on assisting schools to build and coordinate an overall curriculum framework. This initiative will provide opportunities for teachers to complete and refine standards and competencies for all grade levels and to clearly define performance expectations for student work.

ATTAINMENT AND IMPROVEMENT

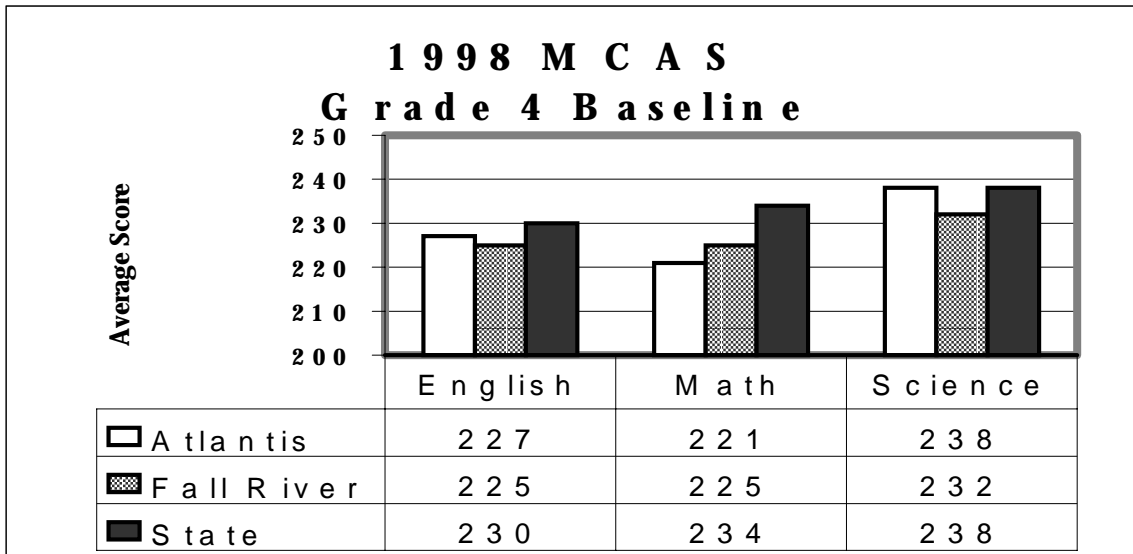
- 8 Atlantis Charter School utilizes a combination of internally and externally developed assessments to measure student achievement. External measures include the Stanford 9, the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, and the MCAS. In addition, the Atlantis Charter School administers the Scholastic Literacy Placement Assessment (SLPA) at the beginning and end of the school year to determine achievement gains in reading and language arts. ACS reports that results of the SLPA, which is administered by classroom teachers in grades one through four, show a significant gain in the number of students reading at or above grade level. At first grade, the proportion of students reading on grade level grew by 26 percent. Last year, the proportion of second-grade students reading on grade level grew an impressive 51 percent. This pattern of increased numbers of students reading on grade level continues in both third and fourth grades.

- 9 Using the standards and competencies developed by its Curriculum Committee, ACS has implemented a portfolio system across all grade levels. The inspection team reviewed a number of student portfolios and found that the portfolio system is not yet being implemented as designed. Student portfolios included pieces chosen by either the teacher, the student, or both in consultation. Portfolio selections varied across classrooms and were unsupported by instructional guidelines or rubrics linking student work to the grade level competency checklists developed by the school. Teacher comments included with portfolio selections lacked substance. Portfolio collections consisted heavily of English language arts work, some mathematics worksheets, and selections from the art curriculum. No pieces generated through the use of technology (computer, audio tape, videotape, and still camera) were observed.

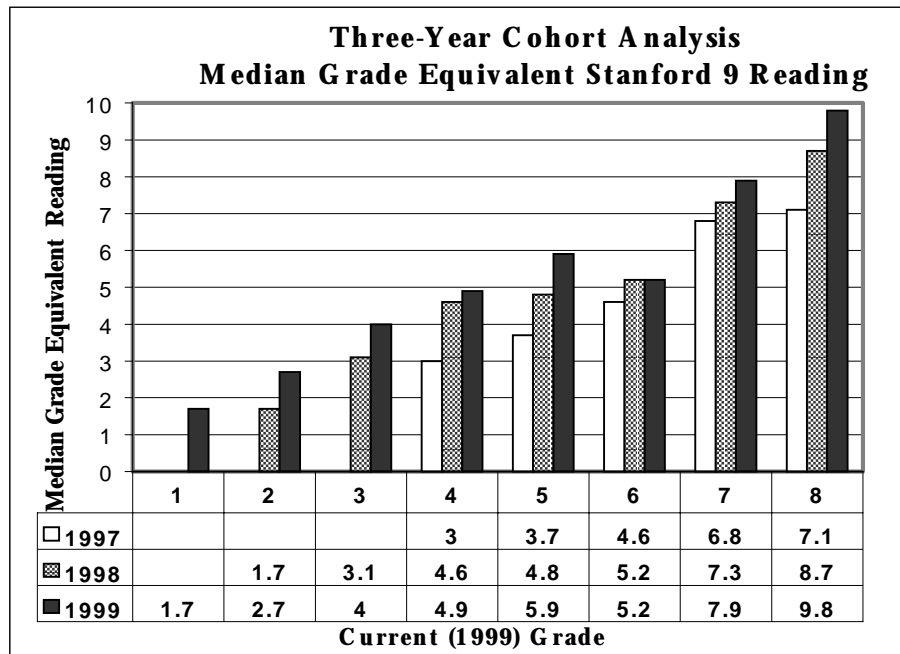
- 10 The Iowa Test of Basic Skills was administered to all third graders as a reading comprehension measure for the last three years: 1996-1997, 1997-1998, and 1998-1999. On average, over the three years of available data, 66 percent of Atlantis Charter School third-graders scored at Advanced or Proficient levels. During the same three-year period, 29 percent of Atlantis Charter School students scored at the Basic Reader level with only 5 percent of third graders scoring at the Pre-Reader level. While these accomplishments are of note, no trend toward a steady increase in third grade reading comprehension levels can be seen.



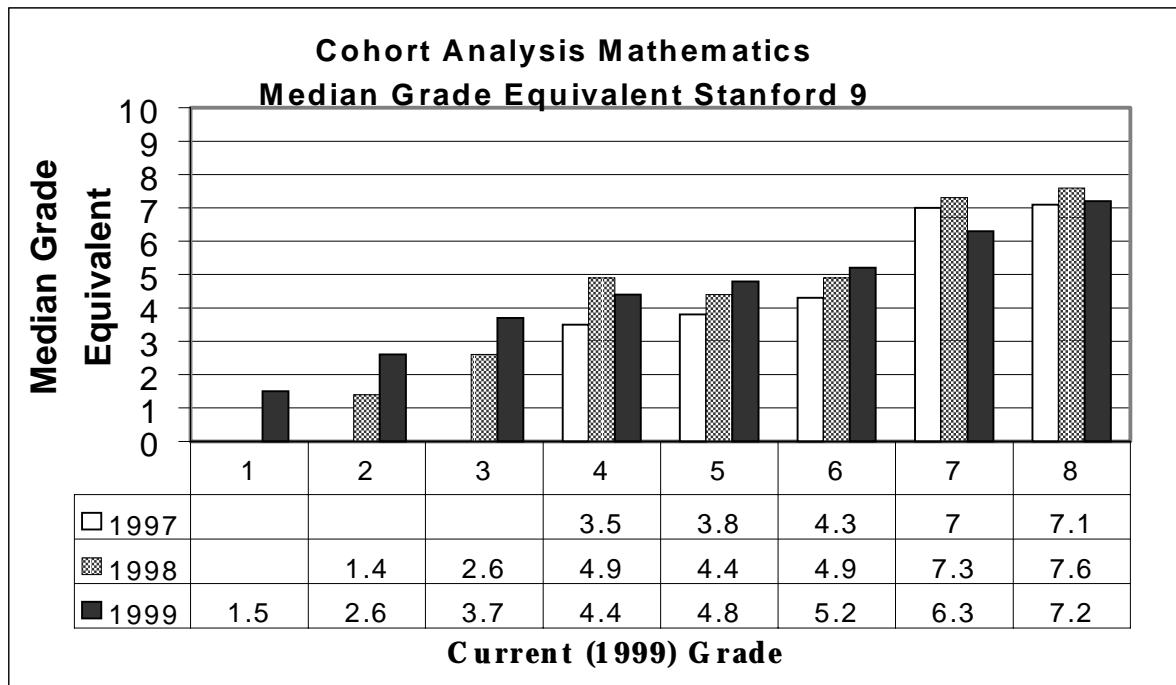
- 11 Atlantis fourth graders scored two points higher in reading and six points higher in math than their counterparts in the Fall River public school district on the 1998 baseline administration of the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS). In science, Atlantis Charter School fourth-graders scored on par with the state average and six points higher than fourth-graders in the Fall River public school district. Atlantis has conducted a categorical analysis of the MCAS scores, finding writing composition, topic development, use of standard English, and science to be the areas of greatest strength for their students. The MCAS mathematics results underscore ACS's need to strengthen its math curriculum. Consistent with the downward trend identified through Stanford 9 testing (discussed below), ACS's mathematics performance on the MCAS lagged behind local and state scores. In an effort to address this issue, the school adopted the Chicago Everyday Mathematics curriculum during the 1998-1999 school year. Information from the MCAS analysis contributes to the need to clarify internal student academic standards and learning objectives for mathematics. The school plans to address this need during the summer of 1999.



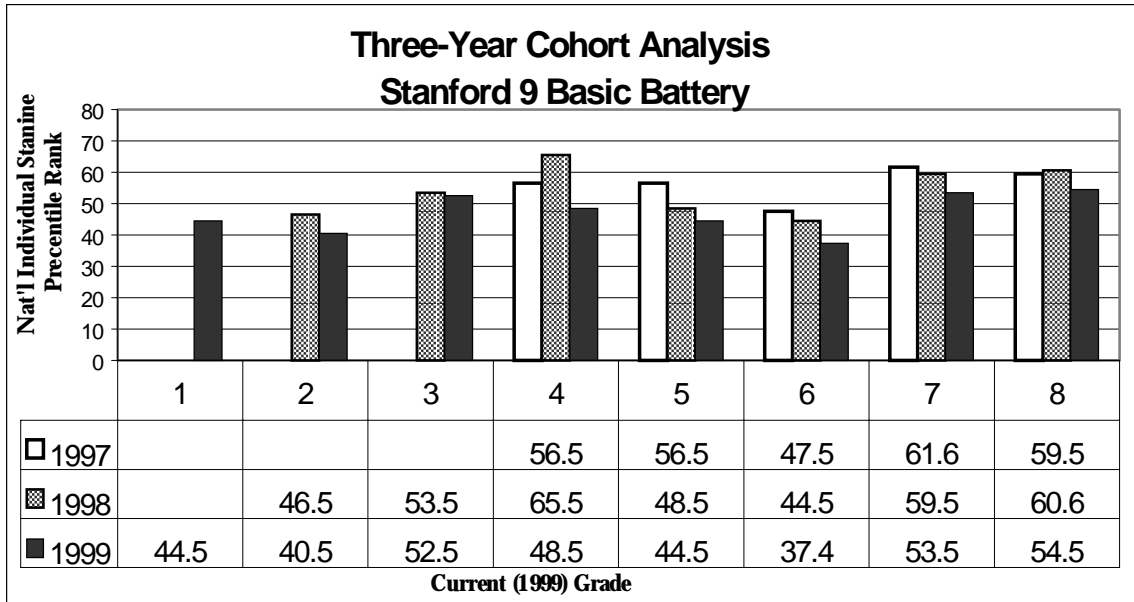
- 12 There are three years of data from administration of the Stanford 9 Achievement Tests. The test was given to all grade levels. Using this data, comparison of the same group of students, or cohort, over a three-year period is possible. Excluding the sixth-grade cohort, all cohorts show reading equivalencies to be at or above grade level by 1999. All cohorts have also shown an annual increase in grade-level equivalency with the exception of the 1999 sixth-grade cohort. Of particular note is the eighth grade, where the median reading equivalent score reaches towards the tenth-grade level.



- 13 In 1999, median grade equivalency in mathematics was reached in only two grades—three and five; and grade level equivalencies dropped from the previous year for cohorts in grades four, seven, and eight. It must be noted that the number of students taking the test in the upper grade levels (five, six and seven) was quite small. Eighteen fifth-graders, nineteen sixth-graders, and twenty-four seventh-graders generated the scores represented in the table below. A shift in scores by one or two students in each cohort can have significant effect on the aggregated results. Nevertheless, one ACS board member described mathematics achievement as an area of concern, characterizing the 1999 scores as ‘sobering’.

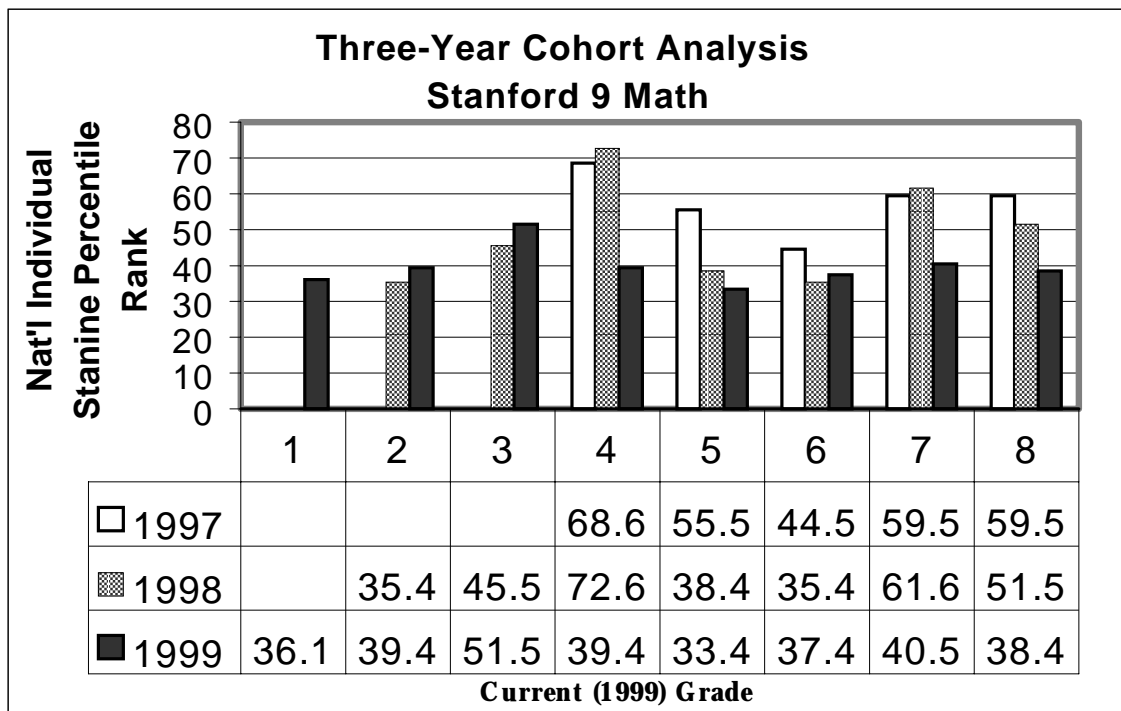
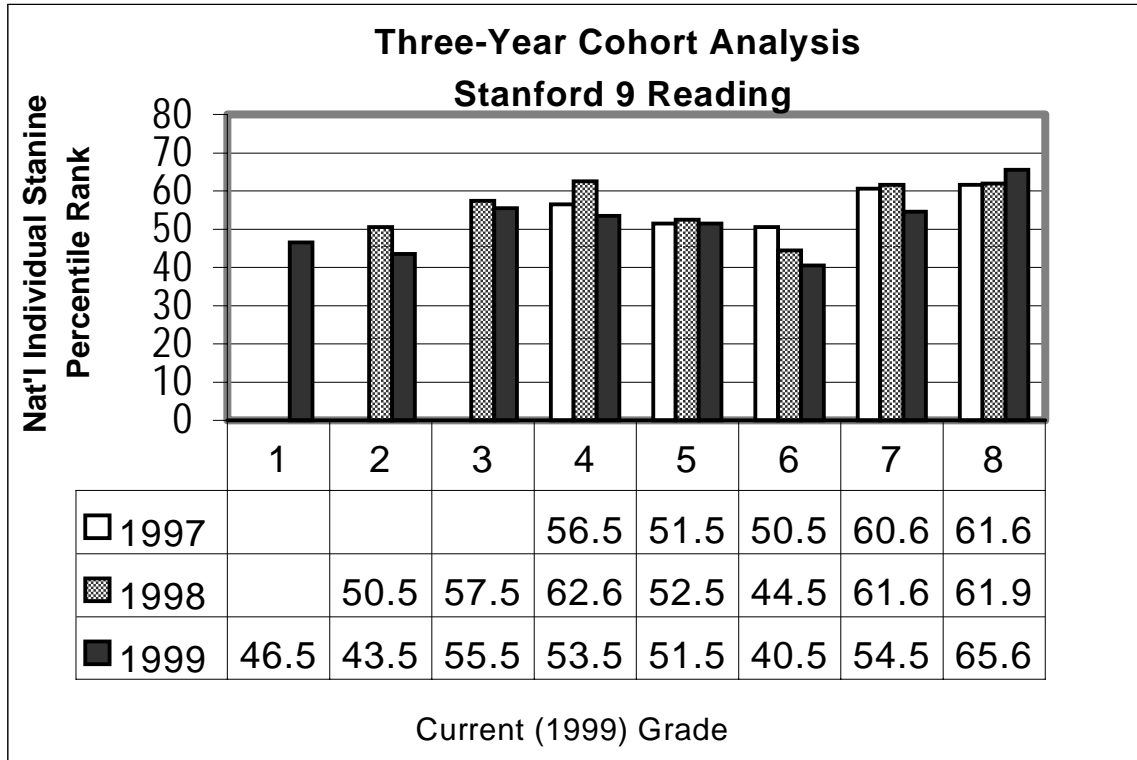


- 14 Additional cohort analysis illuminates how ACS students compare with their national and urban counterparts. Using the Stanford 9 Basic Battery (reading and mathematics combined), comparison of national individual stanine rank reveals diminishing levels of attainment relative to the test's reference group over a three-year period.* In every grade level available for comparison, ACS students lost pace with their national counterparts.

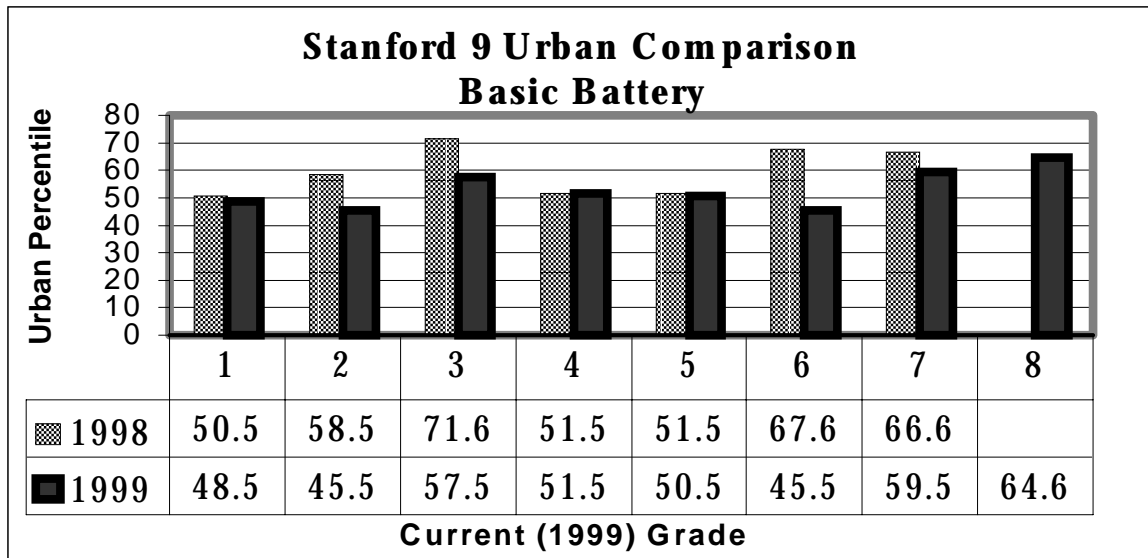


* "The National Individual Percentile Ranks (NIPR) indicate the relative standing of a student in comparison with other students in the same grade in the norm (reference) group who took the test at a comparable time."

NIPR scores are useful for comparing a group's performance relative to the performance of other students. They are not particularly useful to gauge growth over time, since a change in percentiles means different things at different points on the scale. In other words, a change from the 10th to the 20th percentile ranking does not carry the same significance as a change from 50 percent to 60 percent although both would be reported as a 10 percent change.



- 17 Atlantis Charter School's 1998 and 1999 Stanford 9 results provide comparison with other urban students across the nation. Only two years of urban comparison data are available. Analysis of ACS's urban percentile scores on the basic battery of reading and mathematics shows a decline similar to that found in the National Individual Percentile Rankings.



- 18 Every student at Atlantis Charter School receives a student progress report on student progress against strands, or categories, similar to those identified in the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks for each content area. Students are ranked as advanced, proficient, needing improvement, or unsatisfactory in each category. The student progress report includes a personalized narrative written by teachers for each student detailing student academic and behavioral growth throughout the marking period. Parents and teachers meet three times a year to discuss these reports and to determine student goals and expectations for the upcoming marking period.

INDIVIDUAL NEEDS AND DEVELOPMENT

- 19 Consistent with its charter, Atlantis Charter School created the Family Learning Center to meet a variety of student academic and developmental needs. With a mission to "support student achievement and access necessary health and social services," the Family Learning Center provides academic support through its Extended Day Program. Each day, families have the opportunity to participate in before and after school services at the school from 6:45 a.m. until 5:30 p.m. During the extended hours, students receive academic support in the form of homework help and enjoy learning opportunities that are different from, yet supportive of, classroom instruction. The Family Learning Center, in partnership with the local YMCA provides enrichment workshops that include dance, aerobics, arts and crafts, cooking, chorus and gardening among many other activities. Tutoring for students with needs or interests in specific academic areas is also provided through the Family Learning Center.
- 20 To facilitate a successful beginning as a student at Atlantis, the Director of the Family Learning Center has met with each child entering Kindergarten in the fall of 1999, along with his or her parents. Families came to the school and received valuable information regarding immunization requirements and the academic nature of Kindergarten at Atlantis. They also had the opportunity to visit classrooms. In addition to demystifying the meaning of school for the children, these meetings are a significant first step in developing positive family/school relationships.
- 21 A variety of ACS community service learning activities enable students to "demonstrate an understanding of and commitment to civic responsibilities." For instance, students have created a Peace Garden as a tribute to students shot in Jonesborough, Arkansas. They volunteer at local retirement homes, clean trash from school grounds and its surrounding neighborhood, collect and donate items to a local homeless shelter, and distribute food baskets to needy families within their own school community. The students' work has been well received by the community, resulting in awards from the Fall River city government. The school continues to forge partnerships with local agencies, thus providing students with varied and rich community service activities.
- 22 The Family Learning Center supports the needs of students by providing in-school access to a full-time nurse. The nurse keeps up-to-date health records on every ACS student, dispenses physician prescribed medication, and consults with teaching faculty as they develop health-related curriculum. Additionally, the Family Learning Center provides health screenings upon parental request and offers all of its children a school-based immunization program. Counseling services are also available through a school-based partnership with a privately run, local counseling agency.
- 23 An Instruction Service Team (IST), consisting of faculty members from all grade levels and representatives from the school's special education faculty and administration, assists classroom teachers in diagnosing and addressing student

- academic and behavioral concerns. Teachers with concerns about individual student progress are able to request a team review of student achievement, work products, and/or behavior. The team suggests and helps to develop pedagogical or behavioral strategies to meet the student's needs. Should concerns about the student's progress continue, the teacher may return to the IST for further assistance or request a formal, special-education evaluation.
- 24 Atlantis Charter School's special education staff serves seventy students. Special education students at ACS are placed in regular classrooms and provided additional support in all content areas identified on their individual education plan. The school uses its low student-faculty ratio, approximately twelve students per faculty member, to individualize instruction within the regular classroom setting.
- 25 The creation of a full-time special education administrative position in January 1999 resulted in the strengthening and alignment of special education services. Evaluations have been conducted, and individual education plans have been reviewed for all students receiving support services at ACS. Students now receive instruction each day in English language arts and mathematics both in the regular classroom from regular classroom teachers and outside of the regular classroom from special education teachers. Classroom teachers meet with special education teachers on a weekly basis to plan and organize instruction to support students' learning.
- 26 While record keeping and evaluation software for special education is available at the school, this technology is hard to access because it resides on a single computer which is frequently inoperable. These impediments hinder the Special Education staff's efforts to provide comprehensive and timely diagnosis of learning needs.

II. Classroom

Originally conceived with marine science as the primary focus for all instruction, ACS has broadened its teaching and learning goals to include increased student performance on MCAS examinations. The staff continues work on curriculum development, and the addition of a curriculum coordinator position strengthens this process. Much renovation had occurred to create adequate classroom space from the former nuns' rooms that are now used as classrooms. A new library, with a modest but growing collection of resources, is available for student and family use.

CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT

- 27 The school has engaged in a laudable effort to identify standards that guide curriculum development. The faculty has produced a thick document outlining performance expectations, curriculum scope and sequence, and checklists used to gauge student performance and achievement. This effort has been most fruitful at the primary, or K-4, level. At these grade levels, curriculum, classroom instruction, and expectations for student achievement are reasonably well-developed and broadly in alignment with one another. Rigor and alignment are not as well developed at the upper grade levels. This impedes the school's ability to meet the academic needs of older students.
- 28 Effective mathematics teaching and learning is a priority for ACS. Concerned about discouraging mathematics scores on standardized tests, Atlantis Charter School adopted Chicago Everyday Mathematics for grades K-6. The scope and sequence of the program align with the Massachusetts Frameworks. In grades K-4, visitors observe students using mathematics manipulatives to develop concrete awareness of mathematical algorithms. Observation of student work and classroom instruction indicate that curriculum for K-4 is appropriately demanding. However, there is a gap at the upper grades between the high standards identified by the school (and those identified by the state) and the rigor of curriculum and instruction as delivered to students. In the upper grades, there is a lack of frequent assessment of what students know and can do prior to designing and/or delivering instruction. As a result, many lessons do not match the needs of students. For instance, the mathematics curriculum at the upper levels provides only a superficial investigation of mathematical concepts and does not focus on developing students' understanding of these concepts.
- 29 The English language arts curriculum uses a combination of strategies and resources—all chosen for their alignment with the standards, competencies, and curriculum developed over the last two summers. Textbooks are supplemented with process-writing strategies to gird English language arts instruction. At the primary level, reading instruction is guided by the Scholastic textbook series and is extended through the use of literature. Student reading levels are assessed through the use of the New Sucher-Allred Reading Placement Inventory. This inventory is administered by teachers and assists them in

determining independent, instructional, and frustration reading levels for individual students. Some literature is used at the upper levels to augment the McGraw/Hill Spotlight on Literature series. Literature selections are often connected to a content area, such as history, in an effort to integrate instruction.

- 30 ACS has completed a science curriculum for grades K-4. Aligned closely with the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks, the science curriculum is organized into strands, or categories of learning. The faculty has done commendable work in defining assessment activities for each of the competencies identified for grades K-4. However, curriculum and instruction in science at these levels requires further articulation, coordination, and refinement to promote academic growth over time. Observation of primary classrooms reveals that expectations for student performance do not advance sufficiently from one grade level to the next. For instance, the study of seeds and plants appears to have similar learning goals in all primary grades.
- 31 While science curriculum from grades 5-8 has yet to be formalized into specific strands with designated assessments, it is organized into thematic units that are based on state curriculum frameworks. More work is needed to define the science curriculum at the seventh and eighth grade levels. At this time, the seventh and eighth grade curricula do not demand the level of instructional engagement necessary to promote student academic success in the discipline of science.
- 32 The present set of history and social science standards is a promising first step towards a coherent curriculum. However the standards require additional refinement to meet the needs of a faculty that is just learning how to use standards to drive instruction and assessment. As currently developed, the standards for history and social science do not adequately promote a faculty-wide understanding that different types of standards exist within a single subject area, such as standards for historical thinking vs. content standards. Furthermore, these standards have yet to be linked with curriculum and assessments.
- 33 In the classroom, history and social science expectations appear to be more demanding at the lower grades than at the upper grades. Student responses at third, fourth, and fifth-grades indicate an appropriate comprehension of geography, economics, civics, and government concepts. However, at the upper grades, the level of work falls far behind what should be expected. For instance, both fourth-graders and seventh-graders draw a map of the Mississippi River Basin as a part of their geography study. While the mapping exercise alone is appropriate for fourth grade, the seventh grade lesson does not deepen instruction with related topics, such as economics and exploration. This lack of increased expectation at the upper grades produces redundancy and does not promote increased attainment.
- 34 Curriculum scope and sequence exist for art, physical education, music education, and health. While topics to be addressed are identified in each area, they vary widely in structure. The physical education curriculum exists in a format similar to that of the academic content areas and identifies assessment measures and clearly stated scoring rubrics, or scoring guides, for physical education competencies. Additional work is required to configure art, music, and health curricula in a similar way.

- 35 Atlantis' curricular goals and objectives have been compiled into a checklist for teachers to use in measuring student progress toward academic goals. These checklists are attached to student portfolios and serve as the backbone of the internal assessment system. Methods of assessment commonly identified across the school include teacher observation, written work, quizzes and tests, presentations and performances, and student-teacher conferences.
- 36 Though student achievement of checklist objectives is measured at similar time intervals throughout the school year, variations from classroom to classroom occur in how the checklist is used. Additional variation in assessing student performance occurs in teacher interpretation of curricular goals and objectives. In a few classrooms, expectations for student performance, as measured by school-developed checklists, are clearly defined for students by the teacher using rubrics and models. Other teachers state that they measure learning by exposure to content, not by individual student performance. School administrators express a clear awareness that assessment varies across classrooms. Plans to address these issues through professional development activities were discussed with the visiting team; however, no clear written plan exists to work toward greater consistency in teachers' interpretation of standards and assessment.
- 37 A review of student portfolios at all grade levels reveals little evidence of clearly defined rubrics for student performance. Teacher feedback on items included in portfolios frequently consists of percentage scores or symbolic indications of achievement (such as stars). While teachers are able to discuss each student's areas of skill and challenge, they are less adept at describing student progress in the context of the school's standards and curricular goals. This evidence indicates that more work needs to be done to define assessment measures and expectations within each grade levels and from grade level to grade level.
- 38 While one lesson utilizing Windows on a science CD-ROM was observed during the inspection, there is little evidence of student use of technology to support curricular goals. Very few examples of word-processed student work were displayed in hallways or found in student portfolios. While ACS is committed to providing a high-tech learning environment, student access to and use of over forty computers are severely limited at present by implementation problems. Encyclopedias on CD-ROM, National Geographic software, and other technology resources purchased to support instruction are rarely accessible. Teachers strive to introduce technology-based resources by utilizing their personal, home-based technology to prepare units of instruction. While teachers continue to download and copy resources from the Internet at home, they express frustration that students cannot access resources at school.

TEACHING

- 39 Teachers are to be commended for the consistent effort they make to raise student achievement. At the school's opening, the resourcefulness of its teaching staff allowed

instruction to flourish amidst a school that was devoid of furniture, books, and instructional materials. As the bumps of opening a new school have smoothed, teachers at ACS continue to display their commitment to students within the school day as well as by searching for resources to augment instruction outside of the school day.

- 40 A variety of instructional strategies were observed over the course of the three-day inspection. Whole group, individual, and direct small group instruction was extended by teacher modeling, guided practice, and shared pairings. As a whole, the ACS faculty demonstrates a good foundation of instructional skills. Implementation and variation of instructional strategies to meet individual student needs were, however, erratic. The newly created curriculum coordinator position holds promise for modeling and constructing opportunities for faculty to share effective teaching strategies on a school-wide basis. The following anecdotes provide a sense of the variety of teaching observed by the inspection team.
- 41 Students in one classroom are involved in a lesson on the immune system. The teacher has drawn a diagram on the board, and students are asked to create a copy of the diagram. A science text is used to illuminate the workings of the human immune system, yet the level of reading ability of the students does not match the difficulty of the science text. Students are engaged in copying and coloring the diagram but are not provided the opportunity to grapple with scientific concepts represented in the diagram.
- 42 In another classroom, students are fascinated by a lesson in which the teacher has brought in old tools to introduce a unit on simple and complex machines. Students' investigation of the tools provides the teacher an opportunity to assess the knowledge that students bring to this unit of instruction. As they guess the purpose of each tool and explore its working parts, the teacher encourages identification of the simple machines with which students may already be familiar. A lively discussion of simple machines ensues with students identifying the functionality of wedges, screws, levers, etc.
- 43 All students in another class at the upper level are working in pairs. The topic of the lesson is 'ordered pairs' (also known as Cartesian coordinates). A limited number of geoboards and elastic bands are distributed for students to use. A teacher directs one student in the pair to make a shape. Without looking, the second student in the pair is to ask questions of the first and attempt to create the same shape. A teacher demonstrates the task for the students and then instructs them to begin. The two teachers in the classroom move from pair to pair but are unclear between themselves as to the goal, structure, and pace of the lesson. No clear connection between the activity and the concept of 'ordered pairs' is made.
- 44 In another example, at the conclusion of an animated reading lesson, instruction transitions easily to mathematics. Students quickly and purposefully organize the manipulatives required for the next lesson and are alert to teacher instructions. Objectives for the lesson are clearly communicated to students as work begins; and the two teachers in the room move from student to student modeling manipulative use, reviewing strategies, questioning, and focusing students on the concepts to be learned.

- 45 One of the benefits ACS students enjoy is a low teacher-student ratio. Two teachers—one a 'lead teacher' and the second an 'entry teacher'—are placed in every ACS classroom, providing a teacher-to-student ratio of approximately 1:12. While this low ratio is generally helpful, a consistent structure for division of instructional duties between lead and entry-level teachers is not yet in place. In some classrooms, teachers work as effective instructional teams. These teams make good use of student time by leading small groups and directing activities designed to meet individual student needs. In many classrooms, however, whole-class instruction prevails, with one teacher responsible for instruction and the second sharpening pencils, preparing materials, or managing the behavior of a single student.
- 46 In addition to visiting each classroom to set the instructional tone for the day, the ACS Principal is a part of the teaching faculty. One fortunate group of seventh-grade students convenes in the Principal's office each day for reading group. The Principal meets with the seventh-grade faculty to plan for reading instruction and, in this way, is able to model curriculum planning and evaluation strategies for the seventh-grade staff.
- 47 Following a not uncommon phenomenon at the elementary and middle school levels of American education, the ACS faculty at times lacks the necessary sophistication in the domains of history and science to provide accurate and adequate instruction. This situation is most acute at the seventh and eighth-grade levels, where teachers are assigned to deliver instruction in fields other than that in which they were formally trained. No articulated plan for staffing was in evidence at the time of the inspection. Staffing changes planned for the fall of 1999 provide the school with a much needed opportunity to strengthen curriculum and instruction by aligning subject matter expertise with instructional assignment.

RESOURCES

- 48 A new library provides a haven for whole class, small group, and individual research. As financial resources allow, the collection of books will be enlarged to provide materials that support the curriculum being developed by ACS faculty. A qualified librarian has joined the ACS faculty and provides additional instructional support to students and families interested in utilizing library resources.
- 49 Over the course of its charter, ACS has continued to build the amount and type of resources available for instruction. Hands-on science kits, dictionaries, sets of literature books, mathematics manipulatives, microscopes, and other resources are available for student use. As the faculty has continued to articulate and refine the curriculum, additional resources have been identified and acquired. Such resources, however, are more plentiful at lower-grade levels than at upper-grades levels.
- 50 The lack of resources at upper grades hampers the teachers' ability to raise student achievement. Reading in seventh and eighth grades generally consists of a number of downloaded articles from the Internet. The quality of these selections varies greatly, and students lack exposure to longer, complex pieces of literature. There are also few maps and other resources at these grade levels.
- 51 Approximately forty computers are located in small computer rooms found around the school. Faculty, administration, and students report a high degree of frustration as the computers have been in the building for over a year and still remain largely unusable. Despite a considerable investment in hardware, software, infrastructure and wiring, no articulated plan for bringing the technology on line was in evidence. Understandably, the faculty has yet to develop a plan for how technology might support student achievement. The frustration of seeing resources sitting idle has discouraged teachers from using technology in the curriculum.

III. School

Atlantis Charter School was founded by a reform-oriented group who wished to create a school with learning opportunities for students and a strong community focus. The number of children applying to ACS has created the welcome problem of creating additional instructional space to keep up with the demand. Hallways are proudly covered with a myriad of student work. Students dressed in blue and white or khaki and white uniform colors move through hallways populated with welcoming and nurturing staff, visitors, and parents.

ORGANIZATION AND MANAGEMENT

- 52 Since the early days of its charter, the ACS Board of Trustees has made progress meeting the school's needs. Within the short time period between the granting of the ACS charter and the opening of school that first year, the trustees located a suitable facility, a former convent, in which to house a school. The founding board effectively overcame strong community resistance to the school and weathered a change in the school's administrative structure after the first year.
- 53 Interviews with ACS board members indicate a clear practice by the whole board to set policy direction for the school and to entrust policy implementation to the administrators and faculty. However, the flow of information that informs policy decisions by the board is unnecessarily constricted. All board members interviewed indicated that almost all of their information comes exclusively from the ACS Superintendent. Interviews with faculty and administrative staff confirm this structure. For example, on only one occasion has the Principal who was hired for the 1998-1999 school year been asked to address the board regarding progress on curriculum and student achievement. Such a narrow information flow leaves the board ill served and under informed when crafting school policy. As a result, many staff members and parents express frustration with the ACS board and characterize the board as "outside the school."
- 54 Parents and faculty are, in effect, excluded from ACS board meetings, as they occur on no regularly determined schedule and usually convene during the school or work day. Board meetings are held in the Superintendent's conference room, which offers insufficient space for more than a few observers. Parents who serve on the Parents of Atlantis Charter School (PACS) committee have requested the opportunity to attend ACS board meetings and have been told they were not welcome. Members of the PACS committee were informed that any communication to the board must flow from them to the Principal, to the Superintendent, and then on to the board. These actions deter parent and staff involvement and limit access to school governance. They are clearly inconsistent with the school's stated goals and with the spirit of public school governance.

- 55 Timelines for ACS board decisions are vague. As noted in earlier sections of this report, considerable resources have been used to acquire state-of-the-art technology. A year after the technology appeared at the school, it remains inaccessible to students and teachers. The board has yet to develop or demand a clear plan or timeline for making what is no longer state-of-the-art technology available for instruction. In another example, the absence of a decision-making timeline regarding graduation ceremonies for the first group of ACS eighth-grade students delayed planning by students, parents, and faculty until a few weeks prior to the end of school.
- 56 The administrative structure at ACS includes the Superintendent, the Principal, the Director of the Family Learning Center, and the Director of Business and Technology. Also supporting teachers are a Special Education Administrator and a Curriculum Coordinator. Descriptions of roles and responsibilities were provided for the inspection, but some administrative and support personnel were not aware that such descriptions existed. While a favorable first step toward structuring administrative roles to support student achievement, these job descriptions are not yet suitably aligned with actual practice or the needs of the school.
- 57 One example of the unclear roles is the evaluation process for teachers. Written documents state that teachers at ACS report to the Superintendent, yet the Principal is vested with responsibility for all educational activities and, in practice, evaluates teachers. Another example of poor alignment between roles and authorities is the control over budget. While the ACS Principal is the educational leader for the school, he enjoys no direct budgetary control and is unclear as to the decision-making process surrounding curricular budget requests. Thus, opportunities to link resource acquisition with educational goals and activities are diminished.
- 58 The teachers, Parents of Atlantis Charter School Committee (PACS), and other school volunteers express confidence that their ideas and concerns are communicated by the Principal and Family Learning Center Director to the Superintendent. Staff and parents commend the Principal and the Director of the Family Learning Center for their responsiveness and communication but still have concerns about decision-making regarding technology, play areas, academic curriculum, and staffing structures.
- 59 All members of the teaching faculty serve on 'core teams.' Core teams are comprised of teachers from adjacent grade levels and are led by a fellow team member chosen for his or her instructional adeptness. Teams are divided into grades K-2, grades 3-5, and grades 6-8. Core team meetings are designed to give teachers a weekly opportunity to discuss issues of instruction and assessment within a multi-grade structure. These meetings allow teachers to discuss commonalities and variations in expectations, student performance, and curriculum implementation across grade levels.

- 60 Atlantis Charter School's March, 1999 accountability plan enumerates notable goals for student achievement, professional development, board leadership, and family involvement. The absence of a strategic plan to unify the school's efforts in standards, curriculum, assessment, professional development, technology, and leadership hampers the school's ability to make effective use of resources and to provide a strong education to its students. The recent partnership with the Education Alliance at Brown University may help in the development and implementation of a strategic plan to coalesce all areas targeted in the ACS accountability plan.

FACULTY AND STAFF

- 61 The fifty-two members of the ACS teaching faculty bring a wide array of backgrounds and training to the school. Teacher experience is mixed, but reflects approximately equal numbers of experienced and new teachers. Approximately 85 percent of the staff holds Massachusetts certification. In addition to the knowledge and experience ACS teachers bring to the classroom, they contribute their talents and interests to the efforts of the Family Learning Center.
- 62 Faculty selection and hiring processes have evolved over the life of Atlantis Charter School. Initially, the first Principal of the school managed staff selection. This responsibility then passed to the Superintendent. The responsibility is now shared by the new Principal and the Superintendent. Most recently, when two special education teachers were hired, staff members participated in the staff selection process by constructing interview guides and conducting the interviews.
- 63 Along with the Principal and the Curriculum Coordinator, teacher representatives serve on the school's Administrative Team. The team addresses issues of staff concern, such as management of a sick-leave bank and instructional and facilities concerns as they relate to students. Other issues addressed include the organization of special education and the review of student IEPs, MCAS testing schedules, and ideas for instituting a developmental kindergarten program.
- 64 As the school has matured, so has its program of teacher professional development. During the 1998-1999 school year, the Principal began a teacher evaluation process designed to be developmental and not punitive in nature. Under this design, the Principal meets with each teacher in a pre-conference to identify a series of factors associated with effective instructional practice. During the evaluation, the Principal pays particular attention to the areas discussed in the pre-conference. At a post conference, the teacher and Principal work together to identify areas of strength and weakness and to plan for future development based on the observation. The Principal uses this collaborative design to promote linkages between the academic goals of the school and the performance of classroom teachers.

- 65 Teachers also set professional development goals for themselves. The practice is intended to further school goals, such as raising MCAS scores or improving portfolio assessment. However, samples of teachers' professional development goals reviewed during the inspection showed limited evidence of linkages between teachers' individual professional development goals and the academic needs of students. ACS teachers also keep personal teacher portfolios designed to highlight their curriculum, instruction, and assessment accomplishments. These portfolios need further development in the selection process of items for inclusion, reflective feedback, and links to instructional standards.
- 66 Professional development opportunities are provided to small groups of teachers, as well as to the entire faculty. For example, as concern over poor mathematics achievement grew, arrangements were made to send a few teachers to an off-site, intensive mathematics workshop. Whole staff training on mathematics instruction followed this event. Whole faculty professional development has been offered in marine science, team teaching, and health education. However, these promising examples are not sufficient. The components of the professional development structure have yet to be linked strategically to each other and to the overall academic goals of the school.

PARENTS AND COMMUNITY

- 67 The Family Learning Center has taken the lead in designing activities that bring parents, students, teachers, and community resources together in unique and festive ways. One of the many Family Learning Center activities offered last year was a family aerobics class. A member of the teaching faculty served as the aerobics instructor. Both parents and the instructor report that in addition to gaining healthier bodies, information about student performance and school news was exchanged informally at all sixteen sessions.
- 68 In addition to seeking grants to strengthen its already notable parent involvement program, the Family Learning Center works with the School Council and the Parents of Atlantis Charter School committee to offer family evenings with a nationally known storyteller, support groups for children diagnosed with attention deficit disorder, MegaSkills parenting workshops, holiday dances for the whole family, and many other family activities.
- 69 Parents volunteer to support ACS in a variety of ways. In addition to serving on the PACS committee and Site Council, parents assist in classroom instruction and share their career experiences with students. A parent committee formulated the school's uniform policy and assists teachers and students in community-service learning projects. One parent, the father of six ACS students, serves as the school's custodian, offering care not only to the building but also to his children and their classmates.
- 70 Parents have high praise for ACS teachers. Describing the school environment as positive and safe, parents welcome the teachers' commitment to frequent contact

through phone calls, notes, and newsletters regarding the progress of their children. Parents feel welcome in the classroom and are eager to support the school in many ways. They cite programs that match their perceptions of student needs and believe that the weekly newsletters and the detailed narrative reports are strong advantages for students and families at Atlantis Charter School. Most important, parents are pleased that teachers request input from them regarding their children. They feel that they are true collaborators with teachers in the academic and social growth of their children.