

Second Year Site Visit Report

Roxbury Charter High School for Business, Finance and Entrepreneurship

Roxbury, MA

December 8, 2004

Roxbury Charter High School for Business, Finance and Entrepreneurship (RCHS) was granted a charter in 2002 to serve 400 students from the City of Boston in the grades 9 through 12. The school is located in the Roxbury neighborhood of Boston. Currently in its second year of operation, RCHS opened in September 2003 with a 9th grade, planning to expand by one grade and 75 students per year until it reaches its full grade span and enrollment in the 2006-2007 school year. The school's mission statement reads, "The mission of RCHS is to provide students with the skills, knowledge, and experience they will need to succeed in college and in the world of work; to make informed and ethical decisions as citizens and consumers; and to take responsibility for their own economic independence and security." The school's educational philosophy, as described in the original charter application, is to "seek to apply assessment and instructional methods that have been tested and proven, through extensive research, to be effective for achieving the goal of graduating successful learners." RCHS' intended educational program includes a curriculum based on the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks and nationally known standards for business education, and an emphasis on using diagnostic assessment data to help meet the unique educational needs of individual students.

RCHS reported to the Charter School Office on November 11, 2004 that the school enrolls 107 students from the City of Boston. Forty-three percent of students live in Dorchester, 18% live in Roxbury, 15% live in Mattapan, and the remaining 24% come from other Boston neighborhoods. Ninety-nine percent of students are African American, and one percent are Caucasian. Seventy-six percent of students qualify for free- and reduced-price lunch, and 11% have been identified for Special Education services.

The following participants conducted the site visit to RCHS on November 16, 2004. Four members of the Charter School Office (CSO) staff returned for additional data gathering on November 17, 2004.

- Tony Siddall, Assistant Coordinator of Accountability, MA DOE Charter School Office
- Sally Bachofer, Coordinator of Accountability, MA DOE Charter School Office
- Cliff Chuang, Coordinator of Research and Finance, MA DOE Charter School Office
- Richard Lemons, Associate Director, Change Leadership Group, Cambridge, MA
- Sandy Matava, Professor of Public Management, Suffolk University, Boston, MA
- Mary Street, Director of Charter Schools, MA DOE Charter School Office
- Charlie Toulmin, Deputy Director of Charter Schools, MA DOE Charter School Office

Before the visit, the site team reviewed the 2003-2004 Annual Report for the charter school, the school's original charter application, a teacher roster, board minutes, financial information, and correspondence between the school and the CSO. On site, the team reviewed curricular information, staff and student handbooks, and other documents provided by the school. Team members conducted group and individual interviews with Trustees, administrators, teachers, students, and parents, and observed classes.

The purpose of this visit was to corroborate and augment the information contained in the school's annual report and to collect information on the school's performance in the following three key areas, which guide each element of the Massachusetts charter school accountability process:

- Academic program success
- Organizational viability
- Faithfulness to the terms of the school's charter

The evidence gathered by the team in these three areas is presented below.

1. Academic Program Success

Is the school's curriculum based on high academic standards, both in terms of content and implementation?

FINDING 1A: *The school has developed the foundations of a rigorous curriculum. While the existing curriculum for English Language Arts (ELA) and math is clear and appears to be generally aligned with the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks (MCF), some elements of the curriculum are not yet well developed. The curriculum as currently documented consists of 9th and 10th grade scope and sequence documents for math and ELA which identify learning objectives for units and lessons; academic standards drawn from the Boston Public Schools curriculum; and resource materials to support lesson planning for each core academic subject. While there is a school-wide emphasis on using the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks (MCF) to guide the curriculum, the school only has an explicit curriculum map demonstrating MCF alignment for its math curriculum. The ELA curriculum is based on the Boston Public Schools standards, which the school believes are well-aligned to the MCF. While these documents appear to be valuable in guiding teachers in their lesson planning, the curriculum in ELA and math is not yet comprehensive. Additionally, the curriculum does not have any documentation for the 11th and 12th grades, and is not well developed for social studies, science, or business/personal finance.*

FINDING 1B: *RCBS appears to have developed certain common elements that teachers are expected to include in their instruction. Other elements vary more across classrooms. During classroom observations site visitors observed that teachers had consistently posted learning objectives, a "do-now," and an agenda for each lesson. Teachers are individually responsible for ensuring that their lessons are aligned to the MCF. RCBS does not have a formal system to ensure that all necessary standards are covered, but the school offers various informal supports to help teachers plan and implement effective lessons. In classroom observations, team members observed widely varying levels of effectiveness in classroom management. While some classes were well-managed, several teachers did not maintain an environment in which students could focus on and engage in learning.*

Has student performance improved or been persistently strong on internal and external assessments?

Internal:

RCCHS uses a variety of teacher-designed assessments for the ongoing evaluation of student learning. These assessments are designed and administered by individual teachers. RCCHS does not currently aggregate these internal assessment results to demonstrate schoolwide performance.

FINDING 1C: *One key element of the school's academic program, the use of diagnostic assessment data to inform instruction, has not yet been formally implemented.* RCCHS' original charter application proposed the use of diagnostic assessment results to inform instruction, based on a philosophy identified as the Adaptive Learning Environments Model (ALEM). In the school's first year of operation, standardized test results for individual skill areas (to be used for diagnosing specific academic needs) were not collected. This year, these tests have been administered and the results collected, but the results have not yet been analyzed for individual students. RCCHS' charter application calls for teachers to write Individualized Learning Plans (ILP) for each student, which would contain diagnostic assessment data and specific strategies to meet the unique needs of each student. The ILPs have not yet been written, but administrators noted that teachers would spend common meeting time in the upcoming months to create ILPs for their students. The school has also not yet offered intensive training in the use of assessment data to inform instruction, as called for in the charter application.

External:

FINDING 1D: *RCCHS does not yet have a strong base of external assessment results from which to draw conclusions about student performance.* RCCHS does not yet have MCAS results, because no RCCHS students have yet taken the MCAS. The school has baseline standardized test results for the Steck-Vaughn tests in ELA and math this year, and the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) and Nelson-Denny test for reading. Because these are only baseline results they do not yet provide meaningful information about growth or change in student performance. The school also has Steck-Vaughn results for pre- and post-tests last year, which appear to show some growth in student achievement. However, the limited information the school has presented about these results makes it difficult to draw conclusions about what the results show.

2. Organizational Viability

Are the school's purposes and objectives clear and thoroughly understood by those connected with the school – governing body, professional staff, students, and parents?

FINDING 2A: *There is a consensus within the school on RCCHS' broad purposes and objectives.* All stakeholder groups agreed that RCCHS seeks to provide students with the academic skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in college. Stakeholders also agreed that there is a school-wide emphasis on business, finance and entrepreneurship. There were differing interpretations, however, of exactly what this emphasis should mean in practice. While one Trustee described the goal of having a "high school level MBA," other members of the school community described a more generalized emphasis on business carried out through the business/personal finance classes.

Is the school safe and are the physical facilities adequate for the program of the school?

FINDING 2B: *RCCHS provides a safe environment for students. All stakeholders agreed the school provides a safe environment for students.*

FINDING 2C: *While the team found no evidence that student behavior ever threatens student safety, the school does not appear to maintain a student behavior management system that effectively creates an environment in which all students can consistently focus on learning. RCCHS' philosophy of discipline is for teachers to deal with misbehavior as much as possible within their classrooms. While the school has a code of conduct in its student handbook, RCCHS has not defined specific consequences for violating this code, or what level of misbehavior would lead to a student being removed from a classroom. During classroom observations, members of the site visit team saw multiple classrooms where student misbehavior was a significant distraction.*

FINDING 2D: *The school's physical facility is minimally adequate for the program of the school, because it is not handicapped accessible and is not large enough for projected enrollment. While the facility is large enough for the current enrollment level, one administrator reported that it is not large enough for the enrollment level originally projected for this year, and will not be large enough for the enrollment projected next year. As noted below, under the question "Do the school's curriculum, program and activities seem consistent with essential legal and regulatory requirements?," the school is not handicapped accessible. It is important to note also that the school is currently in the second year of a three year lease. Administrators noted that the Board has not yet been active in pursuing a facility for the school to use when the current lease ends.*

Are professional staff members qualified by training and/or experience in the areas to which they are assigned?

FINDING 2E: *The majority of teachers have a content area background appropriate to the subject they teach. Eight out of 11 classroom teachers have either a graduate or undergraduate degree, certification, or have passed the appropriate MTEL test in the subject they teach. Last year, the school reported that 75% of its teachers were "highly qualified" according to the standards of the federal No Child Left Behind Act.*

FINDING 2F: *The majority of teachers are in their first or second year of teaching. Six out of 11 teachers are in their first or second year teaching, and the school has only two teachers with five or more years of teaching experience. Only one classroom teacher from the school's first year of operation returned for the school's second year.*

FINDING 2G: *Teachers receive substantial ongoing support from the Dean of Curriculum and Instruction (DCI) in improving classroom management and instructional strategies. However, the school has not yet implemented a comprehensive or systematic formal professional development system that is aligned with the educational program proposed in the charter application. Overall, teachers reported that they receive valuable support from the DCI on an ongoing basis. According to the evaluation of the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) submitted to*

the CSO by the Board Chair, the financial challenges the school faced last year “resulted in the teacher trainings having to be reduced dramatically.” These opportunities for professional development are described in the original charter as essential to the full implementation of the academic program. Teachers currently have a staff meeting once a week after school, and administrators described plans to use this occasion for common planning time for teachers.

Does the school have an effective governance structure and management system for carrying out the purposes and objectives of the school?

Governance: The RCHS Board of Trustees currently has seven members. Although Trustees bring strong community connections and legal expertise to the Board, other important areas of expertise including financial, K-12 educational, and fundraising are not currently well represented. The Board has recently approved two new members who have a background in fundraising.

FINDING 2H: The RCHS Board of Trustees has not provided adequate or effective oversight over the school’s financial position and capacity for financial management and planning.

Despite serious financial challenges as early as October 20, 2003, when Board minutes show that the school faced a \$304,751 budget deficit, the Board exercised what one member described as “lax” oversight on the school’s finances until the beginning of the current school year. Trustees reported that they left the monitoring of the school’s finances in the hands of the administration and the consulting firm which provided business services, and did not form a finance committee until the spring of the school’s first year of operation. Trustees said that an October 2004 meeting with CSO staff caused them to increase the level of urgency with which they viewed the school’s financial position, and that they now receive weekly cash-flow projections from the school’s bookkeeper. The lack of urgency prior to the October 2004 meeting, particularly because a similar meeting had been held with CSO staff in December 2003, raises concerns about the rigor of the Board’s oversight of RCHS’ finances. Board minutes appear to support the Board’s own claim that its oversight was lax. Although the Board received updates about the school’s budget deficit and cash-flow shortfalls, the minutes do not reflect thorough Board-level discussion about the long-term financial position of the school or how the school would develop a more sustainable financial model.

RCHS has a history of a demonstrated inability to effectively manage its finances (described further below, under the “Management” section of this report), reflecting a failure of the Board of Trustees to ensure that adequate capacity exists at the school level to carry out this critical task. In its first year of operation, RCHS contracted with a consulting firm to provide business services. The Board, however, considered the financial reports produced by this firm inadequate, saying the reports were “indecipherable” and were often received “late or not at all.” Nevertheless, the school continued its relationship with this firm through the end of its contract, in June 2004. For the current school year, RCHS hired an assistant director to be in charge of financial management. This assistant director was laid off early in the year, and administrators reported that he was not qualified for the financial management tasks that were assigned to him.

Currently, the bookkeeper appears to carry out the bulk of the school’s budgeting and financial reporting. The Board and CEO, however, do not have a clear and common understanding of who

is ultimately responsible for the quality and accuracy of these reports, or for making budgetary decisions. This lack of clarity makes it difficult for the Board to ensure that these functions are being carried out effectively. As discussed further under the “Management” section of this site visit report, the financial reports submitted to the CSO by the school appear to have internal inconsistencies and may not be accurate.

Trustees said that the bookkeeper reports directly to the Board, while the CEO and bookkeeper herself said she has a dual reporting relationship with both the Board and the CEO. Based on the CEO evaluation document submitted to the CSO, the CEO does not appear to be ultimately accountable for financial management. This evaluation suggested that the CEO is not responsible for financial management, stating “[The CEO’s] ability to provide...sound financial management policies and practices has been limited due to the lack of financial oversight and support from the Board.” This lack of clarity was present last year, as well, with regard to the school’s relationship with the consulting company that provided business services. Trustees reported that the CEO was primarily responsible for managing this relationship, while the CEO reported that the Board was responsible.

Moreover, despite the importance of the tasks assigned to the bookkeeper, the Board appears not to have thoroughly examined her qualifications to carry out these tasks. When asked, Board members did not know whether she has any formal training or credentials in accounting or bookkeeping (according to her resume she does not, although she has relevant work experience). Additionally, the CEO reported that no references were called when the bookkeeper was hired. Particularly in light of the school’s history of having inadequate financial advice and services, the absence of thorough scrutiny of the bookkeeper’s qualifications reflects a lack of oversight on the Board’s part. The continuing lack of clarity about the lines of accountability for financial reporting and budgeting is a serious concern, particularly in light of the school’s ongoing financial challenges.

Similarly, the Board has not established a clear “point person” at the school level who is responsible and accountable for fundraising. The CEO reported that she is not primarily responsible for setting, tracking, or attaining fundraising goals, and said that fundraising is the responsibility of the Board and of a development consultant working in a volunteer capacity. When asked, the CEO said she did not know the current status of the school’s fundraising efforts, because she has not attended the recent Board meetings at which this issue was discussed. The CEO also stated that she has not discussed the division of roles between herself and the Board regarding fundraising. Given that fundraising is a critical element of the school’s efforts to be financially viable, the failure of the Board and CEO to effectively work together to determine who is responsible for this key task is a serious concern.

FINDING 2I: *The RCHS Board of Trustees has not gathered the thorough information needed to diagnose the causes of the challenges the school faces, and has not developed a sound plan to overcome these challenges and prevent similar challenges in the future. The only systematic information gathering about the school’s performance and internal operations described by the Board was its evaluation of the CEO. Based on the Board focus group during the site visit, the evaluation document provided to the Charter School Office, and various correspondence between the CSO and individual trustees, the CEO evaluation process appears to have been seriously*

flawed. While Board minutes show that the CEO has presented reports on certain aspects of the school's performance at several Board meetings, a review of the Board minutes suggests that these reports were cursory and not comprehensive. The CEO did not attend the October or November Board meetings, despite the serious financial issues RCHS is facing and the administrative reorganization that the Board was contemplating. Thus, the Board appears to have made crucial decisions with little more than a flawed CEO evaluation as their basis.

The evaluation of the CEO was flawed because it was not based on a protocol or instrument that had been agreed to by the full board, was not initiated in a timely fashion, has not yet been completed, and in draft form does not appear to hold the CEO to high standards of performance. The Board chair submitted an evaluation (including findings and a rating of the CEO's performance) by e-mail to the CSO on November 11, 2004. The e-mail stated that the attached evaluation had been "completed by the Board on the CEO." However, on that same day, another Trustee sent out an e-mail to the Board with a different protocol, encouraging them to complete the form in advance of the next meeting. This Board member also sent an e-mail to the CSO stating that contrary to what the Board Chair had implied in a letter to the CSO, the Board had not yet reviewed the CEO. Additionally, on the day of the site visit, one Trustee reported that he had never seen an evaluation of the CEO, and was unsure whether she had been evaluated at all. This evidence suggests that the evaluation presented to the CSO as final was not undertaken according to a pre-determined process, and did not draw on the judgment of all Board members.

The CEO evaluation was not initiated in a timely fashion and has not yet been completed. The Board did not formally evaluate the CEO in the school's first year, and therefore began its first evaluation process several weeks into the school's second year. During the Board of Trustees focus group, one Trustee made clear that the Board had not reached consensus on the findings of the evaluation that had been submitted to the CSO by the Board Chair. Board members reported that although they had recently discussed the evaluation document (after it had been submitted to the CSO as a final evaluation), the Board had not voted to approve the findings. Trustees also reported that they directed the CEO not to complete her evaluation of the director, because he had been offered an early retirement package. The lack of completed evaluations of the two senior school leaders reflects a lack of oversight on the part of the Board.

Moreover, the evaluation submitted to the CSO by the Board Chair does not appear to hold the CEO to high expectations for performance. For example, this evaluation states that "The CEO has demonstrated her ability to secure funding for the school because, in addition to the fact that she wrote our Charter School Application, she has written our Title I applications and each Start Up grant." However, as of the date of the site visit neither of these entitlement grants had been disbursed because of the lateness of their filing and the need for revisions in order to meet the requirements of the grants. Additionally, both the CEO and the Board of Trustees attributed much of the school's financial difficulty to a shortfall in fundraising, yet the evaluation lauds the CEO's effectiveness in securing funds for the school. Additionally, the evaluation makes no mention of RCHS' under-enrollment, and blames the school's financial difficulties on "a lack of financial support and oversight from the Board." The evaluation rates the CEO's performance as "Very Good," despite the school's serious under-enrollment and financial situation. This disconnect between the evaluation findings and the reality at the school suggests that the evaluation has not held the CEO to high standards for performance.

FINDING 2J: *The Board of Trustees has not ensured that the school has a sound plan for moving forward as a viable organization. The Board has developed only a preliminary plan, and this plan appears unlikely to ensure the school's viability for the remainder of the school year.* Trustees reported that the Board has voted to eliminate the CEO position, and they described a general plan to create a new administrative structure consisting of an executive director and a chief financial officer. As described to the site visit team by both the Board and the CEO, the new position would encompass the responsibilities of *both* the CEO and the director. Trustees reported that the CEO would fill the executive director position on an interim basis for the remainder of the year. The Board did not, however, present the site visit team with evidence that this plan was based on a thorough process evaluating the school's needs and how to best meet them. The Board also did not present the site visit team with a detailed explanation of how the plan would be implemented.

The Board described the current administrative structure as “top-heavy” with both a CEO and a director, and Board members hope the new administrative structure will improve their capacity for financial oversight, as well as save money on administrative salaries. This decision, however, was made without completed evaluations of either the CEO or the director. Moreover, the CEO reported that she had not yet discussed with Board members the specific responsibilities that would need to be covered by the new position. Because the Board has neither discussed the specific responsibilities this position would encompass with the CEO, nor completed an evaluation of either individual in the existing positions, it appears that the Board did not make its decision with an appropriate evidence base.

The site visit team had serious reservations about the likelihood of success for the Board's preliminary plan, and the Board did not present the team with any evidence that the proposed structure and staffing plan will be effective. Board members reported that the role of the executive director will be significantly different than the role of the CEO, because it will focus on day-to-day operations rather than external relations and maintaining the school's “vision.” In addition to the shift in *type* of responsibilities, the executive director position will include a substantial *increase* in responsibilities. Since several key management functions have not been effectively carried out with two full time positions, it is unclear how a single person will successfully carry them out. When asked what gave them confidence that the CEO would be able to effectively fill the proposed executive director position, Board members did not present any specific evidence.

Management: The administration at RCHS consists of the CEO, the director, the dean of curriculum and instruction (DCI), the student support coordinator, and a “student advocate.” The administrators described their general roles as follows: the CEO is responsible for the school's adherence to its mission and for external relations; the director is responsible for the day-to-day operations of the school and for the evaluation of teachers; the DCI serves as the instructional leader and is primarily responsible for the academic program; the student support manager is responsible for the Special Education program; and the student advocate is responsible for student behavior management. In practice, there is some overlap among these roles. Overall, while certain leadership and management functions have been carried out effectively, including the management of the day-to-day operations of the school and development of the general

academic program, the administration has not been successful in recruiting students, managing the school's finances, fundraising, or planning and implementing the special education and Title I programs.

FINDING 2K: *The administration has not been effective in managing finances and recruiting students. On these issues, the administration has demonstrated a pattern of being reactive rather than proactive.* RCHS is in an extremely tenuous financial position. The school has not yet developed a realistic plan for a sustainable financial model, and school leaders may not have a full and accurate understanding of the school's current financial position. Although alternative budgets for various potential levels of student enrollment were created and considered during the summer, as of November 9, 2004, RCHS submitted documents to the CSO projecting a \$248,402 budget deficit for Fiscal Year 2005. Moreover, the CSO's analysis of this projection suggests that it has internal inconsistencies and may not be accurate. The CSO's analysis predicts several significant monthly cash-flow shortfalls throughout the year, and an over-reliance on a bank line of credit to cover day-to-day operating expenses.

The ineffectiveness of RCHS' leadership in managing its finances is reflected not only in the school's current financial situation, but also by comments made to the CSO by the Board Chair. In a letter dated November 8, 2004, the Board Chair blamed the school's financial difficulties partly on the actions of the CSO, yet did nothing to resolve its concerns. The letter states (incorrectly) that the CSO had required the school to build a budget based on unrealistic enrollment projections. The letter stated,

[The CSO] required that we submit a budget that was based on the student numbers (175) that we called in on March 18. Our original budget based on 110 students was more realistic, and had we not been required to build a budget upon numbers that we were not seeing, perhaps some of our current cash flow situation might have been avoided.

In fact, although the CSO requested clarification of the school's expected enrollment and the budgetary implications of this enrollment, the CSO did not require that the school submit a budget based on 175 students, nor did it require that the school *follow* a budget based on 175 students if fewer than 175 students were enrolled. Based on the above excerpt, RCHS leaders appear to have believed that they were being required to follow an unrealistic budget. This issue was not raised with the CSO until the receipt of the November 8, 2004 letter quoted above. Moreover, an e-mail from a Board member on July 23, 2004 stated that the Board was confident the school would be able to enroll 175 students. The fact that RCHS attributes some of its financial problems to what school leaders perceived as a CSO requirement, yet did not raise their concern with this perceived requirement until well after the fact, appears to be an example of poor financial management.

RCHS' financial difficulties are to a large degree a result of the school's under-enrollment. In each of its first two years the school has enrolled only about 60% of its projected enrollment targets, creating a large shortfall in per-pupil tuition revenue. In interviews, administrators attributed last year's enrollment difficulties to the fact that RCHS did not yet have a facility when much of the recruiting took place, and to parental uncertainty about a new school. Although the recruiting efforts for the first year had not been successful, administrators told the site visit team that they did not substantially change their recruiting strategy for the second year. Administrators reported that they now believe that demand for the school is lower because of its

August start date, its rigorous academic standards, its longer day, and its uniform policy. As of the time of the site visit, however, the CEO had not taken such basic steps as contacting other schools with similar policies to learn more about their recruiting techniques. Despite two years of serious under-enrollment, RCHS has yet to present a substantially improved plan for student recruitment.

FINDING 2L: *The administration as currently structured and staffed does not have the capacity to effectively manage the school's finances.* RCHS does not have any staff members who are currently responsible for and engaged in financial planning, and relies on the school's bookkeeper as the person primarily responsible for budgeting and financial reporting. As noted above, the bookkeeper works with the school on a part-time consulting basis and was not originally hired to be a business manager or chief financial officer. The CEO did not know crucial details about the school's current cash flow position, including whether the school would have enough funds to make payroll in December. The bookkeeper reported that she—rather than the CEO or the Board's budget committee—has the primary responsibility for preparing the school's budget, but that this “should really be the other way around.” Additionally, although the CEO reported that she is responsible for writing entitlement grant applications, it was unclear to the site visit team whether anyone had assumed responsibility for determining which state and federal grants are available and ensuring that all of these grants are received. Finally, both the CEO and bookkeeper reported that because the school is in “crisis mode” the school has not engaged in *any* long term financial planning, increasing the likelihood of similar challenges in the future. The CEO stated, and the bookkeeper agreed, that the school needs a fulltime business manager or chief financial officer in order to effectively manage the school's finances. The ineffective financial management described above appears to be in part a result of this lack of capacity.

FINDING 2M: *The administration has not effectively implemented a Special Education, Title I, or Limited English Proficient program.* As detailed below, (under the question “Do the school's curriculum, program and activities seem consistent with essential legal and regulatory requirements?”) RCHS' Coordinated Program Review (CPR) revealed many serious areas of partial-implementation or non-implementation of required programs. The failure to substantially implement these required programs is a serious concern.

FINDING 2N: *The administrative structure has allowed the DCI to focus most of her time and energy on supporting and building the academic program. This has allowed the school to lay the foundations of a rigorous academic program.* As noted above (under the question “Is the academic program a success?”), RCHS has developed the foundations of a rigorous academic program. Interviews with teachers suggest that the DCI spends the majority of her time supporting the academic program through one-on-one coaching of teachers, informal classroom observations, and curriculum and assessment development. The administrative structure has been effective in creating an environment in which the DCI can serve as a full time instructional leader.

Are parents satisfied with the performance of the school?

FINDING 2O: *RCCHS did not provide the site visit team with a strong evidence base from which to evaluate parent satisfaction at the school. RCCHS did not administer a parent survey last year, and thus does not have substantial documented evidence regarding parent satisfaction. The parents in the focus group were satisfied with RCCHS, praising the small size of the school and the constant communication from teachers. Most of the family members in this group had only been with the school since the beginning of the current year, and noted that their comments reflected only their first impressions.*

Is enrollment stable?

FINDING 2P: *The school has been substantially under-enrolled in each of its first two years, and has experienced substantial student attrition. This has contributed to serious financial challenges, and raises questions about community demand for the school. RCCHS originally intended to enroll 100 students in its first year. In March 2003, the school reported a pre-enrollment figure of 93 students, and then on October 1, 2003 reported an actual enrollment of 62 students. The school finished the year with 55 students, according to its June 2004 enrollment report to the DOE. This year, administrators reported that the school opened with 70 students, and that enrollment has risen to its current total of 107 students. Current enrollment is still well below the projected enrollment of 175 students.*

3. Faithfulness to the Terms of the School's Charter

Do the school's curriculum, program and activities seem consistent with essential legal and regulatory requirements?

FINDING 3A: *RCCHS has several serious areas of non-implementation or partial-implementation of required programs and services. RCCHS received a regularly scheduled Coordinated Program Review (CPR) from the Program Quality Assurance (PQA) unit of the DOE on October 4-6, 2004. The CPR found that RCCHS has made no provision for identification, assessment or support of Limited English Proficient students. The school is not adequately identifying, assessing or providing services to special education students. Little documentation exists of any attempts the school has made to develop current IEPs, or to obtain parental participation or consent for service implementation. The school's special education teacher does not have Massachusetts certification, nor does she hold a current waiver issued by the DOE. The Title I grant submitted by the school has received only provisional approval from the DOE, and requires additional work in order to be fully approvable. Finally, the building in which the school is located is not accessible to limited mobility persons. The school's failure to implement these programs in accord with federal and state requirements is a serious concern. The school must now submit a corrective action plan for approval to Program Quality Assurance at the Department of Education.*

Has the school made efforts to disseminate models for replication and best practices to the public?

FINDING 3B: *The school has not yet made efforts to define and share best practices or models for replication.* The CEO reported that the school has not yet made efforts to define or share best practices for replication.

Is the school achieving or making progress toward its accountability plan goals?

FINDING 3C: *RCCHS does not yet have an approved accountability plan. The school does not yet have data to determine whether most of the goals in the draft accountability plan have been met.* The accountability plan does not set goals for Organizational Viability or Faithfulness to Charter, and many of the Academic Success goals are not sufficiently clear or specific. The accountability plan has not yet been approved by the CSO. Due to the limitations of the school's standardized test data at this point in time, most accountability plan goals cannot yet be evaluated.

Is the school becoming the school it promised to become in its charter?

FINDING 3D: *The school has laid the foundation for many of the program elements promised in the charter, but has not fully implemented most of these programs.* The emphasis on business, finance, and entrepreneurship is realized primarily through the personal finance and business classes which student take as a regular part of their schedules. Individual teachers, however, described other ways that they make individual efforts to integrate these themes into their daily teaching. As noted above, under the question "Is the school's curriculum based on high academic standards, both in terms of content and implementation?", the business and personal finance written curriculum is under developed. Another key element of the school's original charter application is the Roxbury Charter High School Compact, a collaboration between the school, local businesses, and community organizations. The CEO reported that she has made preliminary connections with several businesses and community organizations and is in the process of building the Compact.

Conclusion

RCCHS has laid the foundations of a rigorous academic program, and appears to be on its way to implementing the business focus that is a key term of its charter. However, the school has created significant challenges for itself that call its organizational viability into serious question. Significant under-enrollment in each of the school's first two years of operation has created major financial difficulties, and has raised questions about the demand for the school. While the administrative structure has allowed one administrator to devote substantial time to developing the academic program, the leadership of the school has fallen short in several key areas. The school has not effectively recruited students to meet enrollment targets, has not effectively managed the school's finances, and has not raised sufficient funds to make up for revenue shortfalls. The Board of Trustees has not successfully carried out its core duty to effectively oversee both the school's finances and its leadership. The school's financial outlook is tenuous at best, and the Board has not ensured that the critical leadership responsibilities mentioned above have been carried out effectively, nor has it demonstrated the capacity for effective planning. Although the Board has proposed an administrative restructuring intended to save costs, the Trustees have not demonstrated that the new structure will be able to successfully meet the

leadership demands of operating a school. RCHS has not yet had a chance to demonstrate that it is an academic success or that it is faithful to the terms of its charter, and in order to achieve these goals it must first overcome the challenges described above and demonstrate that it is a viable organization.