

Renewal Inspection Report

UPHAMS CORNER
CHARTER SCHOOL
BOSTON, MA

October 11-13, 2006

Uphams Corner Charter School
Renewal Inspection Report

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The mission of the Uphams Corner Charter School (UCCS), which is located at 7 Elkins Street in South Boston, is as follows: “Uphams Corner Charter School offers an academically rigorous, rhetoric-centered education in the liberal arts and sciences, leading to sound understanding, earnest reflection, self-discipline, integrity, and action. Our community is devoted to outstanding student performance and whole character formation. We will graduate all our students as powerful, articulate, moral citizens, working for the benefit of all.” UCCS reports that the school’s current enrollment for the 2006-2007 school year is at or near its chartered capacity of 200.

The UCCS school model is focused on rhetoric, defined in the school’s 2006 Annual Report as “the power to use words responsibly for social and personal change.” Progymnasmata, rhetorical exercises developed in ancient Greece, are the foundation of the school’s rhetoric program. Other features of the school’s rhetoric program include the Friday Forum, a weekly debate event; the Student Senate, comprised of student representatives from each class; and the Uphams Corner oath, which is based on an ancient Athenian oath.

According to UCCS, 62 percent of enrolled students reside in Dorchester; the school also draws students from other Boston neighborhoods, including Roxbury, Mattapan, Roslindale, South Boston, Jamaica Plain, and Hyde Park. Department of Education (DOE) data for the 2005-2006 school year show that UCCS enrolled substantially higher percentages of African American/Black students and Hispanic students and a substantially lower percentage of Asian and White students in comparison with the Boston school district. UCCS enrolled lower percentages of students categorized as First Language Not English, Limited English Proficient, Low-Income, and Special Education than Boston enrolled. However, UCCS reported to the Renewal Inspection Team (Team) that the school’s Special Education student population has increased to just over 25 percent this school year.

The UCCS Board of Trustees currently has 10 members, seven of whom have joined the Board since 2005. According to the Board, there are six active subcommittees: governance, finance, accountability, facilities, student achievement, and development.

Although the school’s founders intended – and still intend – to locate the school in the community of Uphams Corner, a diverse Dorchester neighborhood, UCCS has operated in leased space at two successive locations in South Boston, outside the Uphams Corner neighborhood, during the current charter period. The school currently leases a building in an industrial area of South Boston; the lease will expire on August 31, 2007.

UCCS does not have, and has not operated with, a DOE-approved Accountability Plan. However, UCCS developed a draft Accountability Plan in the spring of 2005, and school officials report that they have used the draft Accountability Plan since then. The school’s performance relative to the goals and assessment measures in the draft Accountability Plan are discussed in the following report.

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The Renewal Inspection Team (Team) spent three days on site at UCCS on October 11, 12, and 13, 2006. The Team also obtained and reviewed UCCS data and documents prior to the renewal site visit, on site, and after the site visit.

**Renewal Question 1:
Is the Academic Program A Success?**

MCAS Results

1. UCCS did not meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) requirements for ELA in 2005 and 2006 or for Mathematics in 2004, 2005, and 2006. The school has been identified for improvement in both ELA and Mathematics.
2. The performance of UCCS seventh-grade students on the 2005 and 2006 MCAS ELA exams, the only ELA results that count for accountability determination, declined substantially from one year to the next. The percentage of students scoring in the Proficient or Advanced category dropped from 41 percent in 2005 to 25 percent in 2006; the percentage of students who scored in the Warning/Failing category increased from zero in 2005 to 19 percent in 2006.
3. The majority of UCCS students scored in the Needs Improvement category on the 2006 MCAS ELA exams with the exception of the school's eighth graders, almost half of whom scored in the Proficient category. The percentage of students scoring in the Proficient or Advanced category on the 2006 exams ranged from 11 percent (fifth grade) to 49 percent (eighth grade). The percentage of students scoring in the Warning/Failing category in 2006 ranged from 10 percent (eighth grade) to 39 percent (fifth grade).
4. The performance of seventh-grade students at UCCS trailed the performance of seventh-graders in Boston and statewide on the MCAS ELA exams in 2005 and 2006.
5. The percentage of UCCS students scoring in the Proficient or Advanced category on the 2006 MCAS ELA exams has trailed the comparable percentages of Boston and statewide students. However, a smaller percentage of sixth- and eighth grade UCCS students, and an equal percentage of seventh grade students scored in the Warning/Failing category than the comparable percentage of their Boston peers on the 2006 MCAS ELA exams. In each instance, a higher percentage of UCCS students scored in the Warning/Failing category than the comparable percentage of students statewide.
6. The scores of UCCS sixth-grade students on the 2004, 2005, and 2006 MCAS Mathematics exams, the only Mathematics exam results that count for accountability determination, have been low and have declined each year. The school's best results were achieved by the sixth-grade class in 2004, when 14 percent scored in the Proficient or Advanced category, 51 percent scored in the Needs Improvement category, and 35 percent scored in the Warning/Failing category. Well over half of UCCS students scored in the Warning/Failing category in the subsequent two years.

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7. The majority of UCCS students who took the MCAS Mathematics exam in 2006 scored in the Warning/Failing category.
8. UCCS students underperformed their counterparts in Boston and statewide on the sixth-grade MCAS Mathematics exams between 2004 and 2006, the only Mathematics exam results that count for accountability determination.
9. In 2006, UCCS students in all grades substantially underperformed their counterparts in Boston on the MCAS Mathematics exams. For each grade, the percentage of UCCS students scoring in the Proficient or Advanced category was much lower and the percentage of students scoring in the Warning/Failing category was much higher.
10. UCCS met its sole MCAS-related draft Accountability Plan measure in 2005 but fell just short of meeting the measure in 2006.
11. UCCS analyzes MCAS exam results to identify individual student needs. The school has not prepared the required individual student success plans (ISSPs) for students who have scored in the Warning/Failing category of the MCAS exams.

Other Assessments

12. UCCS administers the Group Reading Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation (GRADE) and the Iowa Test of Basic Skills Mathematics Battery. To date, the school has not met the assessment measures of progress on these external assessments contained in its draft Accountability Plan. UCCS uses the Dynamics Indicators of Basic Early Learning Skills (DIBELS) to diagnose the reading skills of individual students. Most recently, UCCS has joined the Massachusetts Public School Performance (MPSP) project.
13. UCCS has significantly improved its internal benchmarks and rubrics since the DOE's December 2005 site visit. The Team found that UCCS uses well-developed internal assessments and portfolios to evaluate student performance and determine which students should be promoted. The school's draft Accountability Plan contains six assessment measures that rely on the internal benchmarks and rubrics developed by the school; to date, UCCS has not met any of these measures.

Curriculum and Classroom Observations

14. UCCS provides a well-developed, academically rigorous, college preparatory curriculum that is aligned with the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks and the school's mission to provide a rhetoric-centered education and to promote whole character formation. Benchmarks and rubrics have been developed for every content area and are used to assess student performance. The Team found that more than half of the lesson plans reviewed contained sophisticated and rigorous content, an improvement since the DOE's December 2005 site visit.

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15. The population of Special Education students enrolled at UCCS increased significantly in the 2006-2007 school year, and the school has hired additional Special Education teachers to accommodate this increase. The school provides appropriate and well-organized services to its Special Education students.
16. Teacher instruction at UCCS is aligned with the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks and the school's internal benchmarks. The quality of instruction observed the Team has improved since DOE's December 2005 site visit: the Team found that teaching strategies employed by UCCS teachers were consistent and effective. Student behavior has also improved: although the DOE reported observing student disruptions in some classrooms, student behavior in the classrooms observed by the Team was polite and respectful, although not all students appeared engaged. The Friday Forums visited by the Team reflected the school's mission to provide a rhetoric-centered education.
17. The UCCS corridors and stairs are clean. Classrooms at UCCS are brightly painted; classroom space and supplies appeared limited but adequate for instruction. The Team saw few examples of student work on display. The school has not integrated technology into its instructional program; the school is preparing to establish a student computer laboratory with donated equipment.

**Renewal Question 2:
Is the School a Viable Organization?**

1. UCCS has grown during the current charter period, adding a grade in each of the first four years of its charter. The school's enrollment has been lower than planned during the past two school years, a circumstance that has affected the school's budget and educational program. UCCS Board members, staff, and parents attribute enrollment challenges in part to the school's location outside the Uphams Corner area. The school has not maintained a waiting list each year, as required by its draft Accountability Plan.
2. UCCS has experienced operating deficits in the last two fiscal years. UCCS reported to the Team a net asset balance of \$186,004 as of June 30, 2006, the lowest level since the first fiscal year of the current charter period. The school reports that it has addressed the fiscal monitoring problems that led to the most recent operating deficit. The UCCS foundation has not raised substantial funds to date. Resource constraints have prevented the school from providing some educational services envisioned in the original charter.
3. UCCS has received unqualified opinions from its auditor in each of the three fiscal years audited (2003-2005). The auditor identified a material weakness in the fiscal year 2005 audit but also reported that the problems had been addressed.
4. After a period of major turmoil in its third year, UCCS has built a new leadership structure that provides stability and security to all members of the school community. The school climate is characterized by enthusiastic support for the school and its mission, a collaborative and supportive learning environment, and a strong sense of community.

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5. At the time of the Team’s visit, UCCS records showed that all but two of the school’s 17 teachers had college or graduate degrees; those two teachers were not Highly Qualified under the provisions of the No Child Left Behind Act. One other teacher did not meet the federal requirement for subject matter competence, according to the school. Most teachers have been employed at the school for less than two years. The school’s teacher turnover rate declined by more than 50 percent after the fourth year.
6. UCCS has instituted a strong professional development program. The school’s comprehensive Teacher Performance Evaluation System (TPES) provides rubrics for the skills and knowledge required to be a competent teacher and is supplemented by other performance evaluation techniques. UCCS has met the measure contained in its draft Accountability Plan regarding teacher quality.
7. The teachers at UCCS are engaged and committed. They appreciate and support the school’s strong culture of improvement. Although they are concerned about poor student performance on the MCAS exams, they also expressed confidence that the school can successfully use its internal benchmarks to improve academic performance.
8. UCCS students participating on the Student Senate feel engaged in and proud of the school. They reported that the teachers are supportive and effective and expressed the view that the school is academically strong. They were able to articulate the meaning of “rhetoric,” describe the school’s approach to discipline, and discuss the school’s community service program.
9. UCCS parents expressed very positive views of the school’s teachers, administration, and environment. They said that the school’s rhetoric program has increased their children’s ability to think and express themselves clearly and has boosted their self-confidence. They feel engaged in and supported by the school. They firmly believe that UCCS is academically successful.
10. UCCS administrators, teachers, students, and parents feel that UCCS is a safe and secure environment. While on site, the Team noted some safety issues.
11. The UCCS Board of Trustees meets regularly and in the last two years has been appropriately engaged in school governance. Recently, the Board has added new members, thereby reaching for the first time the minimum membership required by the school’s bylaws. The Board has worked to strengthen its governance capacity and processes.
12. The UCCS Board of Trustees has not fully complied with the requirements of the open meeting law.
13. The UCCS current bylaws do not fully comport with DOE requirements for charter school bylaws and with state law.
14. There is a disparity between the UCCS community’s positive perceptions of the school’s academic progress and the school’s results to date.

**Renewal Question 3:
Is the School Faithful to the Terms of Its Charter?**

1. The UCCS curriculum, instruction, and culture support and promote the school's mission. UCCS offers an academically rigorous, rhetoric-centered, college preparatory program that has been strengthened since the DOE's site visit in December 2005. The school has not yet achieved sufficient improvement in student performance, as measured by MCAS scores and other external assessment data.
2. UCCS has met approximately 20 percent of the assessment measures outlined in its draft Accountability Plan.
3. UCCS has requested approval from the DOE to eliminate some initiatives from the school's charter.
4. UCCS has undertaken limited dissemination efforts during the current charter period.

**Renewal Question 4:
If the School's Charter is Renewed,
What are Its Plans for the Next Five Years?**

1. The Accountability Plan proposed by UCCS for the next charter period proposed by UCCS contains only one MCAS-related assessment measure. Several other assessment measures contained in the proposed Accountability Plan are problematic.
2. The UCCS Board has initiated a strategic planning process but has not yet developed a comprehensive action plan with implementation timelines to guide the school during the next charter period. UCCS is continuing to seek a new facility that will enable the school to relocate to its target neighborhood of Uphams Corner. The Board is also focusing branding, marketing, and generating additional revenue to support the school.

ABOUT THE RENEWAL PROCESS AND SITE VISIT REPORT

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

Once this application has met a minimal review of its clarity and coherence, the Department of Education works with an independent evaluation team, which conducts a site visit of the school to corroborate and augment the school's application for renewal. This report is the result of one such evaluation.

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

How to read this report

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

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

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RENEWAL INSPECTION TEAM

F. Daniel Ahern, Jr. is the President of Clarus Group, a consulting firm dedicated to helping governments and nonprofit organizations meet high standards of performance and integrity. Clarus Group has conducted numerous charter school renewal inspections as part of the Class Measures inspection team. Clarus Group also trains Examiners for the Massachusetts Office of Educational Quality and Accountability and monitors their work. Prior to co-founding Clarus Group, Dan served for ten years as the First Assistant Inspector General for Management in the Massachusetts Office of the Inspector General. He has also been a performance auditor for the Virginia General Assembly and an independent consultant to state agencies in Massachusetts and Virginia. He has taught graduate courses in nonprofit management and public administration at Northeastern University and Clark University. He holds a Master of Public Administration degree and a Bachelor of Arts degree from Northeastern University.

Helen Apostolides has over 34 years of experience as both a teacher and administrator in public education. She worked for 11 years as an Elementary School Principal in Peabody, Massachusetts. She instituted the Skills for Life program at her school, which won national recognition. Her school was the first to collaborate with Lesley University Literacy Collaborative and then restructure the reading program to the Collaborative's standard. Additionally, she helped facilitate the development of full-day kindergarten throughout the district. She was an assistant principal for 14 years and a reading and mathematics teacher in numerous grade levels (3, 5, 6, and 7) for over 10 years. She received the Pride of Peabody award in 2003 and was a semi-finalist in Massachusetts in NASA's Teacher in Space Program. She earned a Master of Education degree in Elementary Education from Boston State College and a Master of Teaching degree in History on the secondary level from Salem State College.

Pamela Bloomfield is the Vice President of Clarus Group, which has conducted numerous charter school renewal inspections as part of the Class Measures team. Prior to co-founding Clarus Group, she served in several positions in the Massachusetts Office of the Inspector General, including ten years as the Deputy Inspector General for Management. She has also been the Assistant Director of Finance and Administration for an Oregon county; a management consultant assisting federal, state, and local government agencies; and a course assistant teaching written and oral communications at the Harvard Business School. She currently serves on the Board of Editors of *Public Administration Review* and on the Board of Directors of a local nonprofit organization. She holds a Master of Public Administration degree from the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University and a Bachelor of Arts degree from Smith College.

Douglas Renick is an independent consultant who works with nonprofit organizations and school districts to provide facilitation and strategic planning. He has recently been a whole-school change coach in the Boston Public Schools, working with principals and teachers to implement and sustain improvements that increased student performance. He has used Total Quality Education as an approach to improvement in schools, and for many years he managed Harvard University's Center for Training and Organization Development. He holds a Master of Science degree in Management from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, a Master of Divinity degree from Union Theological Seminary, and a Bachelor of Arts degree from Southwestern University.

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Dennis Vogel, *coordinator of on-site inspection*, worked as a public school educator for the past 36 years, most recently as the Executive Officer of Interventions for the Springfield Public Schools. As the intervention officer, he was responsible for facilitating leadership development and strategic academic changes as well as leading administrative and faculty teams in writing school improvement plans for underperforming schools (NCLB). He began teaching in South Central Los Angeles in 1970 and has worked continuously in education, serving as a special education teacher, a guidance counselor, an assistant principal, Director of Alternative Programs, and Executive Officer of Interventions. Currently, he works as an independent consultant to school districts around whole school reform and alternative education. He received his undergraduate degree in psychology from Long Beach State University and continued his education at the University of Southern California with emphasis on special education. Dr. Vogel holds a master's degree in counseling and a doctorate in school psychology from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

Peter Davies, *team supervisor and report editor*, is a former British School Inspector who has worked in school and district accountability for more than ten years in the United States, the United Kingdom, Europe, and the Middle East. He was formerly an administrator with the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development in Paris and a visiting professor to the Oxford University Department of Educational Studies. He currently trains Examiners for the Office of Educational Quality and Accountability and monitors their work. He holds a Master of Arts degree from Cambridge University and an advanced graduate degree in educational administration from London University.

Dan Ahern and Pamela Bloomfield are Clarus Group principals working under contract to Class Measures Ltd for the purpose of this contract.

Peter Davies, Douglas Renick, and Dennis Vogel are members of Class Measures Ltd.

Helen Apostolides is an independent contractor working for the Massachusetts Office of Educational Quality and Accountability.

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SETTING

The mission of the Uphams Corner Charter School (UCCS), which is located at 7 Elkins Street in South Boston, is as follows: “Uphams Corner Charter School offers an academically rigorous, rhetoric-centered education in the liberal arts and sciences, leading to sound understanding, earnest reflection, self-discipline, integrity, and action. Our community is devoted to outstanding student performance and whole character formation. We will graduate all our students as powerful, articulate, moral citizens, working for the benefit of all.” UCCS opened in September 2002 with one fifth-grade class of 80 students and added one additional grade in each of the three subsequent years. The school is organized into “houses”: the first house is comprised of the fifth and sixth grades, and the second house is comprised of the seventh and eighth grades. UCCS reports that the school’s current enrollment for the 2006-2007 school year is at or near its chartered capacity of 200.

The UCCS school model is focused on rhetoric, defined in the school’s 2006 Annual Report as “the power to use words responsibly for social and personal change.” Progymnasmata, rhetorical exercises developed in ancient Greece, are the foundation of the school’s rhetoric program. Other features of the school’s rhetoric program include the Friday Forum, a weekly debate event; the Student Senate, comprised of student representatives from each class; and the Uphams Corner oath, which is based on an ancient Athenian oath.

According to UCCS, 62 percent of enrolled students reside in Dorchester; the school also draws students from other Boston neighborhoods, including Roxbury, Mattapan, Roslindale, South Boston, Jamaica Plain, and Hyde Park. Department of Education (DOE) data for the 2005-2006 school year show that UCCS enrolled substantially higher percentages of African American/Black students and Hispanic students and a substantially lower percentage of Asian and White students in comparison with the Boston school district. UCCS enrolled lower percentages of students categorized as First Language Not English, Limited English Proficient, Low-Income, and Special Education than Boston enrolled. However, UCCS reported to the Renewal Inspection Team (Team) that the school’s Special Education student population has increased to just over 25 percent this school year. Table 1 presents a comparison of the 2005-2006 school year enrollment percentages in these categories for UCCS, Boston, and the state.

Table 1.
Comparison of 2005-2006 Student Demographic Data
for UCCS, Boston, and the State

Subgroup	UCCS	Boston	State
African American/Black	78.0	42.8	8.3
Asian	2.3	8.5	4.6
Hispanic	15.3	33.4	12.9
White	3.4	13.6	72.4
Multi-Race, Non-Hispanic	1.1	1.1	1.4
Native American	0.0	0.5	0.3
First Language Not English	26.0	36.8	14.3
Limited English Proficient	6.8	16.0	5.3
Low Income	67.8	73.1	28.2
Special Education	14.1	19.3	16.5
<i>Data Source: Department of Education enrollment data</i>			

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The UCCS Board of Trustees currently has 10 members, seven of whom have joined the Board since 2005. According to the Board, there are six active subcommittees: governance, finance, accountability, facilities, student achievement, and development. The subcommittees report to the Board at the Board's monthly meetings.

Although the school's founders intended – and still intend – to locate the school in the community of Uphams Corner, a diverse Dorchester neighborhood, UCCS has operated in leased space at two successive locations in South Boston, outside the Uphams Corner neighborhood, during the current charter period. The school currently leases a building in an industrial area of South Boston; the lease will expire on August 31, 2007. The Board has explored several alternatives that would enable the school to occupy an existing building in the Uphams Corner area.

UCCS does not have, and has not operated with, a DOE-approved Accountability Plan. However, UCCS developed a draft Accountability Plan in the spring of 2005, and school officials report that they have used the draft Accountability Plan since then. In July 2006, the UCCS Board voted to approve the same set of goals and assessment measures for submission to the DOE as the school's proposed Accountability Plan for the next charter period. The school's performance relative to the goals and assessment measures in the draft Accountability Plan are discussed in the following report.

FINDINGS

The Renewal Inspection Team (Team) spent three days on site at Uphams Corner Charter School (UCCS) on October 11, 12, and 13, 2006. The Team conducted focus group interviews with the UCCS Board of Trustees (Board), students, parents, and teachers and conducted interviews with the Head of School, the Director of Studies, the Assistant Principal, the Director of Student Support Services, the Business Manager, and the Accountant. In addition, the team made 29 classroom observations and attended two Friday Forums.

The Team obtained and reviewed UCCS data and documents prior to the renewal site visit, on site, and after the site visit. The information reviewed included Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) data for the charter period; external test results; the school's draft Accountability Plan; the school's Charter Renewal Application; curricular material; student portfolios; annual reports; the school's bylaws; minutes of Board meetings held between October 2003 and September 2006; annual budgets; audited financial statements and management letters for the three years ending June 30, 2002 through June 30, 2005; leases; teacher and Head of School evaluations; handbooks; information on teacher qualifications; and second-, third-, and fourth-year site visit reports prepared by the Department of Education (DOE).

RENEWAL QUESTION 1: IS THE ACADEMIC PROGRAM A SUCCESS?

MCAS RESULTS

The Team examined all the results obtained by UCCS students on the MCAS English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics exams during the current charter period. The Team compared the school's MCAS results to those attained by middle school students in Boston and statewide. The Team also examined the DOE data on the MCAS exam results obtained by the one student subgroup with reportable results: low income. In reviewing the MCAS exam results, it is important to keep in mind that because of the relatively small numbers of students taking the exam each year in each grade (ranging from just 18 fifth graders in 2006 to 65 sixth graders in 2005), a small number of students can have a large impact on the results.

- 1. UCCS did not meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) requirements for ELA in 2005 and 2006 or for Mathematics in 2004, 2005, and 2006. The school has been identified for improvement in both ELA and Mathematics.**

As shown in Table 2, below, UCCS student MCAS results did not meet AYP requirements in the aggregate for ELA in 2005 and 2006 or for Mathematics in 2004, 2005, and 2006. The school has been identified for improvement in both subjects.

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**Table 2. Uphams Corner Charter School
Adequate Yearly Progress History
2004-2006**

		2004	2005	2006
English Language Arts	Aggregate	N/A	No	No
	All Subgroups	N/A	N/A	N/A
Mathematics	Aggregate	No	No	No
	All Subgroups	N/A	N/A	N/A
<i>Data Source: Department of Education MCAS data</i>				

2. The performance of UCCS seventh-grade students on the 2005 and 2006 MCAS ELA exams, the only ELA results that count for accountability determination, declined substantially from one year to the next. The percentage of students scoring in the Proficient or Advanced category dropped from 41 percent in 2005 to 25 percent in 2006; the percentage of students who scored in the Warning/Failing category increased from zero in 2005 to 19 percent in 2006.

Table 3, below, presents the results obtained by UCCS students on the MCAS ELA exams during the charter period. Multiple-year results are available only for the seventh grade; the state implemented ELA exams for the fifth, sixth, and eighth grades in 2006. Consequently, only the seventh-grade results count for accountability determination.

The performance of the school’s seventh-grade classes declined substantially from 2005 to 2006. The percentage of students scoring in the Proficient or Advanced category dropped from 41 percent in 2005, when three percent – one student – achieved an Advanced score, to 25 percent in 2006, when no student achieved an Advanced score. Moreover, whereas no students scored in the Warning/Failing category in 2005, almost one in five (19 percent) did so in 2006. The majority of seventh-grade students performed in the Needs Improvement category in both years.

**Table 3. Uphams Corner Charter School
MCAS English Language Arts Results
Grades 5 – 8**

Year	N	Advanced	Proficient	Needs Improvement	Warning/Failing	Proficient or Advanced
Fifth Grade						
2006	18	0	11	50	39	11
Sixth Grade						
2006	54	0	22	65	13	22
Seventh Grade						
2005	39	3	38	59	0	41
2006	52	0	25	54	19	25
Eighth Grade						
2006	63	0	49	41	10	49
<i>Data Source: Department of Education MCAS data</i>						

- 3. The majority of UCCS students scored in the Needs Improvement category on the 2006 MCAS ELA exams with the exception of the school's eighth graders, almost half of whom scored in the Proficient category. The percentage of students scoring in the Proficient or Advanced category on the 2006 exams ranged from 11 percent (fifth grade) to 49 percent (eighth grade). The percentage of students scoring in the Warning/Failing category in 2006 ranged from 10 percent (eighth grade) to 39 percent (fifth grade).**

Table 3, above, also shows the performance of all UCCS on MCAS ELA exams in 2006. The eighth-grade students performed best overall: almost half (49 percent) scored in the Proficient category, 41 percent scored in the Needs Improvement category, and 10 percent scored in the Warning/Failing category. The percentage of students who scored in the Proficient or Advanced category in 2006 ranged from a high of 49 percent in the eighth grade to a low of 11 percent in the fifth grade. With the exception of the eighth grade, the majority of UCCS students have scored in the Needs Improvement category. The percentage of students scoring in the Warning/Failing category ranged from 10 percent on the eighth-grade MCAS ELA exams to 39 percent on the fifth-grade exams.

- 4. The performance of seventh-grade students at UCCS trailed the performance of seventh-graders in Boston and statewide on the MCAS ELA exams in 2005 and 2006.**

Table 4 presents comparative data for UCCS, Boston, and statewide students on the MCAS ELA exams in 2005 and 2006. Multiple-year results are available only for the seventh grade; the state implemented MCAS ELA exams for the fifth, sixth, and eighth grades in 2006. Consequently, only the seventh-grade results count for accountability determination.

Seventh grade students at UCCS underperformed their peers in Boston and statewide on the exam. Each year, a lower percentage of UCCS students scored in the Proficient or Advanced category, although in 2005 the performance of UCCS students approached that of Boston students: 41 percent of UCCS students scored in the Proficient or Advanced category compared to 44 percent of Boston students. That same year, the percentage of UCCS students scoring in the Warning/Failing category was lower than the comparable percentages of Boston and statewide students: UCCS had no students scoring in either of these categories, whereas Boston had 17 percent, and the state had seven percent. In 2006, however, the performance of seventh-grade students at UCCS was significantly below that of students in Boston and statewide: only 25 percent of the school's seventh graders scored in the Proficient or Advanced category, compared to 43 percent in Boston and 65 percent statewide.

**Table 4. Comparison of Uphams Corner Charter School
With Boston and State
MCAS English Language Arts Results
Grades 5 – 8**

Year		N	Advanced	Proficient	Needs Improvement	Warning/ Failing	Proficient or Advanced
Fifth Grade							
2006	UCCS	18	0	11	50	39	11
	Boston	3,998	7	28	43	22	35
	State	72,709	15	44	31	9	59
Sixth Grade							
2006	UCCS	53	0	23	64	13	23
	Boston	3,785	4	32	42	22	36
	State	73,381	10	54	28	8	64
Seventh Grade							
2005	UCCS	39	3	38	59	0	41
	Boston	4,406	4	40	40	17	44
	State	76,719	10	56	27	7	66
2006	UCCS	51	0	25	55	20	25
	Boston	4,307	4	39	36	20	43
	State	74,508	10	55	26	9	65
Eighth Grade							
2006	UCCS	63	0	49	41	10	49
	Boston	4,337	5	49	30	16	54
	State	76,243	12	62	19	7	74

Data Source: Department of Education MCAS data

- The percentage of UCCS students scoring in the Proficient or Advanced category on the 2006 MCAS ELA exams has trailed the comparable percentages of Boston and statewide students. However, a smaller percentage of sixth- and eighth grade UCCS students scored in the Warning/Failing category than the comparable percentage of their Boston peers on the 2006 MCAS ELA exams. In each instance, a higher percentage of UCCS students scored in the Warning/Failing category than the comparable percentage of students statewide.

Table 4, above, also shows the performance of students at UCCS, in Boston, and statewide on MCAS ELA exams in 2006. In each instance, UCCS students underperformed their peers in Boston and statewide with respect to the percentage that scored in the Proficient or Advanced category. A much higher percentage of UCCS students scored in the Needs Improvement category on each exam relative to Boston and statewide students. However, a smaller percentage of UCCS students scored in the Warning/Failing category than the comparable percentage of Boston students on the sixth- and eighth-grade MCAS ELA exam in 2006; the percentage of UCCS students scoring in the Warning/Failing category tied that of their Boston counterparts on the seventh-grade exam in 2006. The percentage of UCCS students scoring in the Warning/Failing category on the 2006 exams was higher than the percentage of students statewide scoring in the Warning/Failing category in each case.

6. **The scores of UCCS sixth-grade students on the 2004, 2005, and 2006 MCAS Mathematics exams, the only Mathematics exam results that count for accountability determination, have been low and have declined each year. The school’s best results were achieved by the sixth-grade class in 2004, when 14 percent scored in the Proficient or Advanced category, 51 percent scored in the Needs Improvement category, and 35 percent scored in the Warning/Failing category. Well over half of all UCCS students scored in the Warning/Failing category in the subsequent two years.**

Table 5 presents the performance of UCCS students on MCAS Mathematics exams. Multiple-year results are available only for the seventh grade; the state implemented MCAS Mathematics exams for the fifth grade in 2006, and only one eighth-grade class at the school has taken the exam. Consequently, only the seventh-grade results count for accountability determination.

The school’s sixth-grade scores have been low and have declined each year from 2004 to 2006. In 2004, 14 percent scored in the Proficient or Advanced category, 51 percent scored in the Needs Improvement category, and 35 percent scored in the Warning/Failing category. Since then, no UCCS student has achieved an Advanced score; the percentage of students achieving a Proficient score has dropped from 11 percent in 2004 to two percent in 2005 and four percent in 2006; and the percentage of UCCS students scoring in the Warning/Failing category has increased from 35 percent in 2004 to 60 percent in 2005 and 70 percent in 2006.

**Table 5. Uphams Corner Charter School
MCAS Mathematics Results
Grades 5 - 8**

Year	N	Advanced	Proficient	Needs Improvement	Warning/ Failing	Proficient or Advanced
Fifth Grade						
2006	18	0	6	39	56	6
Sixth Grade						
2004	65	3	11	51	35	14
2005	42	0	2	38	60	2
2006	53	0	4	26	70	4
Seventh Grade						
2006	51	0	4	31	65	4
Eighth Grade						
2006	63	0	2	29	70	2
<i>Data Source: Department of Education MCAS data</i>						

7. **The majority of UCCS students who took the MCAS Mathematics exam in 2006 scored in the Warning/Failing category.**

Table 5, above, also shows the performance of all UCCS students on the 2006 MCAS Mathematics exam. The majority of students who took the exams in 2006 scored in the Warning/Failing category, ranging from 56 percent of fifth graders to 65 percent of seventh graders to 70 percent of sixth and eighth graders. Only a very small percentage of students (ranging from two percent of eighth graders to six percent of fifth graders) scored in the Proficient category, and no student scored in the Advanced category.

8. UCCS students underperformed their counterparts in Boston and statewide on the sixth-grade MCAS Mathematics exams between 2004 and 2006, the only Mathematics exam results that count for accountability determination.

Table 6, below, presents comparative data for UCCS, Boston, and statewide students on the sixth-grade MCAS Mathematics exams. Multiple-year results are available only for the seventh grade; the state implemented MCAS Mathematics exams for the fifth grade in 2006, and only one eighth-grade class at the school has taken the exam. Consequently, only the seventh-grade results count for accountability determination.

In 2004, UCCS students clearly underperformed students statewide. In addition, although UCCS students underperformed Boston students in the percentage of students who scored in the Proficient or Advanced categories (14 percent compared to 18 percent, respectively), they outperformed their Boston peers in the percentage who scored in the Warning/Failing category (35 percent compared to 54 percent, respectively).

Table 6 also shows that in 2005 and 2006, UCCS sixth-grade students underperformed their peers in Boston and statewide by large margins. A much higher percentages of UCCS students scored in the Warning/Failing category on the sixth-grade exams in 2005 and 2006 relative to students in Boston and statewide. Compared to Boston students, the percentages of UCCS students earning Warning/Failing scores were 11 percent higher in 2005 and 20 percent higher in 2006,. Compared to students statewide, the percentages of UCCS sixth grade students scoring in the Warning/Failing category were 37 percent higher in 2005 and 45 percent higher in 2006.

**Table 6. Comparison of Uphams Corner Charter School
With Boston and State
MCAS Mathematics Results
Grades 5 - 8**

Year		N	Advanced	Proficient	Needs Improvement	Warning/ Failing	Proficient or Advanced
Fifth Grade							
2006	UCCS	18	0	6	39	56	6
	Boston	4,009	8	17	35	49	25
	State	72,796	17	26	34	23	43
Sixth Grade							
2004	UCCS	65	3	11	51	35	14
	Boston	4,166	6	12	29	54	18
	State	76,661	17	25	32	25	42
2005	UCCS	42	0	2	38	60	2
	Boston	3,958	8	15	28	49	23
	State	74,784	17	29	30	23	46
2006	UCCS	54	0	4	26	70	4
	Boston	3,789	6	14	30	50	20
	State	73,469	17	29	29	25	46
Seventh Grade							
2006	UCCS	51	0	4	31	65	4
	Boston	4,317	6	16	33	45	22
	State	74,646	12	28	33	28	40
Eighth Grade							
2006	UCCS	63	0	2	29	70	2
	Boston	4,331	7	16	29	48	23
	State	76,276	12	28	31	29	40

Data Source: Department of Education MCAS data

9. In 2006, UCCS students in all grades substantially underperformed their counterparts in Boston on the MCAS Mathematics exams. For each grade, the percentage of UCCS students scoring in the Proficient or Advanced category was much lower and the percentage of students scoring in the Warning/Failing category was much higher.

Table 6, above, also compares the performance of UCCS students in all grades with the comparable performance of students in Boston, and statewide on the 2006 MCAS Mathematics exams. UCCS students in each grade substantially underperformed their peers in Boston and statewide. The percentages of UCCS students scoring in the Proficient or Advanced category (no UCCS student scored in the Advanced category) trailed the comparable percentages of Boston students by 16 percent (sixth grade) to 21 percent (eighth grade). These percentages also trailed the comparable percentages of students statewide by 32 percent (sixth grade) to 38 percent (eighth grade). Moreover, a much higher percentage of UCCS students scored in the Warning/Failing category: UCCS students underperformed Boston students by a range of 7 percent (fifth grade) to 22 percent (eighth grade) and underperformed students statewide by a range of 33 percent (fifth grade) to 41 percent (eighth grade).

10. UCCS met its sole MCAS-related draft Accountability Plan measure in 2005 but fell just short of meeting the measure in 2006.

The school's draft Accountability Plan contains one MCAS-related assessment measure:

Two-thirds of students will show competence in writing, as defined by a score of at least 6 in the composition section of the seventh-grade MCAS. *Metric: Grade seven MCAS composition test.*

MCAS data produced by UCCS show that the school exceeded this measure in 2005: 97 percent of 39 UCCS seventh-graders received a score of at least 6 in the MCAS composition section. In 2006, the school came close to meeting this measure: almost 65 percent of 51 UCCS seventh-graders received a score of 6 in the MCAS composition section in 2006. Had one additional student received a 6, the school would have met its measure.

11. UCCS analyzes MCAS exam results to identify individual student needs. The school has not prepared the required individual student success plans (ISSPs) for students who have scored in the Warning/Failing category of the MCAS exams.

The school's Director of Studies told the Team that when the MCAS exam results become available, he disaggregates and reports them to the school's faculty. At the department level, the MCAS exam results are used to identify the areas where specific students have performed poorly and to develop strategies to boost their performance. Teachers interviewed by the Team confirmed that the MCAS exam results are disaggregated, shared, and discussed in department meetings. They discussed strategies under consideration, such as Saturday classes, for improving student scores on the MCAS mathematics exams. They also said that they are attempting to provide students with more modeling of MCAS questions.

Since August 2006, UCCS has participated in the Massachusetts Public School Performance project (MPSP). The school's Charter Renewal Application provides the following description of the MPSP: "The MPSP has designed . . . an assessment battery . . . that is more closely aligned with the content and level of difficulty of the MCAS than any other diagnostic battery. Six times per year, MPSP administers and scores these assessments, analyzes the data, reports it to school staff, works one-on-one with teachers for strategic, data-driven improvement, and connects teachers with other teachers in the network who have demonstrated competency in the teacher's weak area."

UCCS has not prepared ISSPs for students who have scored in the Warning/Failing category of the MCAS exams. UCCS does prepare individual student plans based on the school's internal benchmarks (discussed later in this section).

OTHER ASSESSMENTS

12. UCCS administers the Group Reading Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation (GRADE) and the Iowa Test of Basic Skills Mathematics Battery. To date, the school has not met the assessment measures of progress on these external assessments

contained in its draft Accountability Plan. UCCS uses the Dynamics Indicators of Basic Early Learning Skills (DIBELS) to diagnose the reading skills of individual students. Most recently, UCCS has joined the Massachusetts Public School Performance (MPSP) project.

GRADE. UCCS administers the GRADE, which measures reading comprehension and vocabulary skills, in the fall and again in the spring of each year. The school’s draft Accountability Plan states as the first goal: “All students will demonstrate proficiency in the liberal arts.” Under this goal, the draft Accountability Plan contains the following assessment measures of student performance on the GRADE:

All students will read at or above grade level, as defined by a nationally normed test, after three years at the school. *Metric: Group Reading Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation (GRADE), administered annually.*

The GRADE has a standard score of 100. UCCS defines a score “at or above grade level” as any score nine standard score points below 100 or higher. In its Charter Renewal Application, the school reported that the above-cited assessment measure was not met by the students who entered the school in 2002, 75 percent of whom scored at or above grade level in the May 2006 GRADE. Of the eight students who entered UCCS in 2003, only one student remained in the school after three years; UCCS did not provide data on the GRADE performance for this single student.

A second literacy assessment measure contained in the draft Accountability Plan is as follows:

Each successive class will achieve a higher average score on the nationally normed reading test than the class of the previous year, for the term of this Accountability Plan. *Metric: Group Reading Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation (GRADE), administered annually.*

UCCS calculates median scores, rather than mean scores, to track progress on this assessment measure. The data reported by the school, presented in Table 7, show median score increases within grades from fall to spring, rather than median scores for each successive class. Thus, the data reported by the school do not comport with the measure.

**Table 7. Group Reading Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation (GRADE)
Increase in Median Standard Scores
2002 - 2006**

Increase in Median Standard Score				
2002 - 2006				
Year	Class of 2006	Class of 2007	Class of 2008	Class of 2009
1	0	--	--	--
2	5	5	--	--
3	- 1	5	10.7	--
4	4	5	1.5	1.5
<i>Data Source: UCCS Charter Renewal Application</i>				

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ITBS Mathematics Battery. UCCS also uses the ITBS Mathematics Battery to track advances in students' math skills. The school's draft Accountability Plan contains the following assessment measure regarding student performance on the ITBS:

All students will demonstrate proficiency at or above grade level in mathematics, as defined by a nationally normed test, after four years at the school. *Metric: Iowa Test of Basic Skills.*

UCCS provided the Team with the average grade equivalents on the ITBS Mathematics Battery of students who entered the school in 2002 and took the ITBS in the spring of 2006. According to these data, these students scored the following average mathematics grade equivalents: 5.7 for sixth graders, 6.3 for seventh graders, and 7.3 for eighth graders. The above-cited measure requires that each student demonstrate proficiency at or above grade level. Because none of the average grades demonstrated proficiency at or above grade level, the school has not met the measure.

The school's draft Accountability Plan contains a second math assessment measure:

Each successive class will achieve a higher average score on a nationally normed mathematics test than the class of the previous year, for the term of this Accountability Plan. *Metric: Iowa Test of Basic Skills.*

The meaning of the phrase "each successive class" is unclear; however, UCCS has interpreted the measure to require comparisons of the percentile rank of each grade with that of the previous grade on a single year's tests. According to data provided to the Team from UCCS, the percentile rank of the four grades at UCCS on the 2006 ITBS was as follows:

Grade 5: 36.6
Grade 6: 29
Grade 7: 34
Grade 8: 32

As these data show, each UCCS grade has not achieved a higher percentile rank than the class of the previous year; thus, the school did not meet the above-cited assessment measure in 2006.

DIBELS. UCCS administers the DIBELS three times a year to assess oral reading fluency, phonemic awareness, and decoding. The school reportedly uses the DIBELS scores to chart the progress of entering students. The DIBELS data provided to the Team by the school charts student scores from the fall of 2004 and the winter of 2005. These appear to be the same data provided to the DOE in May 2005 and referenced in the DOE's Year Three Site Visit Report. The DOE's January 2006 Year Four Site Visit Report noted that the school had provided no additional DIBELS data to the site visit team. The Director of Studies told the Team that the school has not yet organized the DIBELS data.

MPSP. As previously discussed, UCCS has recently begun to participate in the MPSP, which will produce assessment data to the school six times per year.

13. UCCS has significantly improved its internal benchmarks and rubrics since the DOE's December 2005 site visit. The Team found that UCCS uses well-developed internal assessments and portfolios to evaluate student performance and determine which students should be promoted. The school's draft Accountability Plan contains six assessment measures that rely on the internal benchmarks and rubrics developed by the school; to date, UCCS has not met any of these measures.

In the January 2006 Year Four Site Visit Report, which reported on the DOE's December 2005 site visit to the school, the DOE found that UCCS lacked a consistent set of internal benchmarks defining what a student should know and be able to do by grade level or by graduation. The DOE report also found that the physical portfolios observed in various classrooms were not clearly tied to passage or exit standards. Since then, UCCS has completed a detailed set of benchmarks and rubrics to assess student performance in every content area. The Team's review of the benchmarks and rubrics and of the physical portfolios revealed that the benchmarks and rubrics are well developed and clearly relate to the content of the physical portfolios. The Team confirmed through interviews that these assessments are written collaboratively and are regularly co-normed by the departments by grading the same piece of work and comparing grades; the assessments are used as exit criteria for promotion from the first and second houses (i.e., from grades six and eight). According to the Director of Studies and teachers interviewed by the Team, teachers devote two or three school days to the portfolios at the end of each unit.

Assessment of the UCCS curriculum is almost entirely focused on the benchmarks. Departments meet and work collaboratively to write and co-norm the assessments, which are then approved by the Director of Studies. Much of the professional development around co-norming was based on the Reader's and Writer's Workshop "tuning" protocols received by the English Department. Rubrics for each benchmark were then developed by department teams with the understanding that the rubrics would remain the same from one content benchmark to another.

Students are assessed several times on the benchmarks for each unit. Students collect their most successful benchmark assessments in a portfolio that is maintained in their homeroom classes. Two or three school days are devoted to the portfolios at the end of each unit. The portfolios are used as exit criteria for promotion from the first house (grades five and six) and the second house (grades seven and eight); students must complete 80 percent of the benchmarks with a rubric score of at least a 3 in order to pass to the next class.

The DOE's January 2006 Year Four Site Visit Report contained the following observation regarding the classroom portfolios: "While the team observed physical portfolios in various classrooms, it remains unclear how teachers use this format for collecting and assessing student work to increase student achievement or inform their own practice." In reviewing three completed "full-year" portfolios and other individual classroom portfolios, the Team found that benchmarks now clearly inform the content of the portfolios. When a benchmark is completed, the teachers enter the benchmark rubric scores for each student into the Veracross data management system in use at UCCS, and these scores are then available to administrators and teachers wishing to check on the progress of any student. Some classroom portfolios reviewed by the Team were empty because the classroom had not yet completed a full unit benchmark;

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other classrooms had completed at least one unit assessment. The Team noted that some of the student writing in the portfolios contained misspellings, leading the Team to question the rigor of the rubric score of 3 for the portfolios.

In support of the previously cited goal of student proficiency in the liberal arts, the school's draft Accountability Plan contains the following three assessment measures that rely on the rubrics and benchmarks developed by the school:

All students will meet predetermined promotion goals in science. *Metric: Teacher-derived rubrics.*

Data provided by UCCS show that in the 2005-2006 academic year, 26 students (14 percent) failed to complete 80 percent of the science benchmarks with a rubric score of 3 or better. Thus, the school has not met this assessment measure.

All students will meet predetermined promotion goals in social science. *Metric: Teacher-derived rubrics.*

Data provided by UCCS show that in the 2005-2006 academic year, 20 students (11 percent) failed to complete 80 percent of the social science benchmarks with a rubric score of 3 or better. Thus, the school has not met this assessment measure.

All students will demonstrate Stage I proficiency in Latin, as defined by the Classical and Modern Language Frameworks. *Metric: Teacher-derived rubrics, based on goals approved by an outside committee.*

Data provided by UCCS show that in the 2005-2006 academic year, 11 students (10 percent) failed to complete 80 percent of the Latin benchmarks with a rubric score of 3 or better. Thus, the school has not met this assessment measure.

The school's draft Accountability Plan contains the following goal: "All students will demonstrate proficiency in the art and practice of rhetoric." The two related assessment measures, which rely on the benchmarks and rubrics developed by the school, are as follows:

All students preparing to graduate from the second house will have passed at least five progymnasmata. *Metric: Teacher-derived rubrics, assessed annually by outside committee chaired by professor of rhetoric.*

According to the Director of Studies, UCCS assigned only four progymnasmata to students preparing to graduate from the second house in the 2005-2006 academic year. Thus, the above-cited measure has not been met.

All students preparing to graduate from the second house will present and receive a grade of rubric-based at least a "3" (satisfactory) on a multimedia analysis of the mass media as part of their capstone unit. *Metric: Teacher-derived rubrics, assessed annually by outside committee chaired by professor of rhetoric.*

According to the Director of Studies, UCCS has not required students preparing to graduate from the second house to present a multimedia analysis of the mass media. Thus, the above-cited measure has not been met.

The school's draft Accountability Plan contains the following goal: "All students will demonstrate an understanding of the essential connections between scholarship, character formation, and social justice." The related assessment measure, which relies on the rubrics and benchmarks developed by the school, is as follows:

All students will meet predetermined promotion goals in character formation, designed by staff.

According to the Director of Studies, UCCS students were held accountable for meeting these goals in the first and second years of the school's operation, but they were not held accountable for meeting these goals in the third and fourth years. (He stated that UCCS plans to require adherence to these goals in the fifth year.) Thus, the above-cited measure has not been met.

CURRICULUM AND CLASSROOM OBSERVATIONS

14. UCCS provides a well-developed, academically rigorous, college preparatory curriculum that is aligned with the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks and the school's mission to provide a rhetoric-centered education and to promote whole character formation. Benchmarks and rubrics have been developed for every content area and are used to assess student performance. The Team found that more than half of the lesson plans reviewed contained sophisticated and rigorous content, an improvement since the DOE's December 2005 site visit.

UCCS has developed a fully documented curriculum that is closely aligned with the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. Benchmarks were developed from the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks for each content area taught: English (which the school specified as literacy and rhetoric beginning in year four of the current charter period), math, science, social studies, Latin, fine arts, and physical education. The school then produced scope and sequence plans for each course to ensure framework coverage and to provide timelines to guide instruction. Next, unit plans were constructed; in interviews with the Team, school leaders and faculty described the unit plans as the "backbone" of the curriculum. Finally, daily lesson plans were produced. There is a template for each curricular sequence. All benchmark information is posted on the Veracross data management system in use at the school and is updated daily. The Team reviewed this sequence for all disciplines both in hard copy form and on the data management system; the Team found that the curriculum has been fully documented.

The DOE's January 2006 Year Four Site Visit Report expressed concern regarding the unit plans: "Though a structured curriculum is now in place, the written unit plans lack consistent sophistication and rigor in content." The Team scrutinized unit plans used in eight classrooms observed by the Team. Five of the eight plans were sophisticated and rigorous; the other three were considerably less rigorous: for example, they allowed for single word answers to questions requiring a written response.

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UCCS offers an academically rigorous, college preparatory curriculum. The school uses a two-strand literacy model for English developed in partnership with the Hansen Institute for Literacy and Language: fundamental literacy and Reader's and Writer's Workshop. For classroom textbooks, the Mathematics Department uses *Connected Math* for grades six through eight and the Houghton Mifflin series for grade five. The Social Studies Department uses *History Alive* for all grades. The Science Department uses the *Explorer* series for all grades. The Latin Department uses the Jenney's *Latin* series for grades seven and eight.

The UCCS curriculum is rhetoric-centered, consistent with the school's mission to provide a rhetoric-centered education. The UCCS Director of Studies defines rhetoric as "putting every discourse event into as full a context as possible and aiming to come to sound judgment on matters." In his view, the study of rhetoric, when linked to the process of experience, reflection, and action, provides students with the tools to act appropriately, bringing about the personal and social change. Progymnasmata, rhetorical exercises developed in ancient Greece, are the foundation of the school's rhetoric program. These exercises, which number 14, begin with a fable and end with an exercise that requires the student to defend/attack a law. The exercises range from simple to complex; each follows a prescribed process that includes the following elements: definition of term, boundaries of the exercise, rubric, composition, delivery, evaluation, and rite of passage. One step in the process entails presentations at the school's Friday Forums, described in the school's Teacher Handbook as "the signature moment of our entire week, a sign of the mission's vitality in our community life. The founders designed this time as a modern version of the Athenian Assembly where ordinary people used rhetoric to manage their community. It's essentially, then, the very point of the school – the students practice rhetoric, think on their feet, share their ideas, emotions, and convictions." The Team's observations of Friday Forums are provided later in this section.

Since August 2006, UCCS has used the term "crew" for homeroom period in order to reinforce and structure the school's character formation goals, as reflected in the school's mission to promote "sound understanding, earnest reflection, self-discipline, integrity, and action" as well as "whole character formation." Crew teachers are responsible for assessing their students according to the following benchmarks, scored as rubrics: earnest reflection, compassion, integrity, self-discipline, and industry. Crew leaders help students gather proof that they are meeting the benchmarks and develop a character formation portfolio. Character formation rubrics are listed and scored on student report cards. As noted earlier, UCCS has not used these rubrics in the past two years but plans to do so in the 2006-2007 school year.

Finally, June Term is a two-week period of half-days during which students devote the mornings of both weeks to community service projects in Uphams Corner. The afternoons of the first week are devoted to portfolio defenses, and the afternoons of the second week are focused on curriculum development.

15. The population of Special Education students enrolled at UCCS increased significantly in the 2006-2007 school year, and the school has hired additional Special Education teachers to accommodate this increase. The school provides appropriate and well-organized services to its Special Education students.

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The school's population of Special Education students increased from 35 in the 2005-2006 school year to 51 in the 2006-2007 school year, with two additional students placed on 504 Plans. To accommodate the needs of these students, UCCS added one Special Education teacher at the beginning of the 2006-2007 school year. During the Team's site visit, the Head of School told the Team that he was interviewing for another Special Education teacher.

UCCS provides mainstreaming, inclusion, and pull-out services to its Special Education Students, based on student needs identified in each student's Individualized Education Program (IEP). The Team reviewed 10 IEP plans on file at UCCS and found them to be complete and professional. Student files were neatly labeled. Team members were able to select a student randomly, find the student's file and a list of his or her teachers, and read all correspondence between the Special Education office and the teachers. The Team also observed that the school's Special Education Office was well organized, with student records clearly identified and accessible. Especially noteworthy were the summary notes provided to each teacher concerning their Special Education students.

16. Teacher instruction at UCCS is aligned with the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks and the school's internal benchmarks. The quality of instruction observed the Team has improved since DOE's December 2005 site visit: the Team found that teaching strategies employed by UCCS teachers were consistent and effective. Student behavior has also improved: although the DOE reported observing student disruptions in some classrooms, student behavior in the classrooms observed by the Team was polite and respectful, although not all students appeared engaged. The Friday Forums visited by the Team reflected the school's mission to provide a rhetoric-centered education.

The Team observed 15 classroom lessons at UCCS: five classes observed were in the first house, which includes grade 5 and grade 6; nine classes were in the second house, which includes grade 7 and grade 8; and one was a Special Education class. The sizes of the classes observed ranged from 16 to 26. Five areas of focus were rated: objective of the lesson and plan; expectations of learning and attitudes; methodology, pedagogy and formative assessment; classroom management; and resources. The Team used a rubric to rate the observed lessons: a score of 3 was high and exemplified good practice, a score of 2 was average and met acceptable standards, and a score of 1 was low and did not meet the standards of acceptable practice. Based on the Team's scores, instruction in the classrooms observed scored above average instruction in all areas except "resources" (discussed below). The lesson plans reviewed by the Team confirmed that the instruction was aligned with the school's internal benchmarks, which are aligned with the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks.

The DOE's January 2006 Year Four Site Visit Report expressed concern regarding the "wide range of instructional expertise" and "lack of consistency in the implementation of common teaching and learning strategies observed in the classrooms". The Team did not find these problems. Team members observed that UCCS teachers followed a consistent routine procedure for each daily lesson, thereby maximizing available learning time. Advance preparations by the teachers were evident. Teachers listed the Do Now activity, the objective of the day's lesson, key questions, an agenda, and the homework assignment on the white boards in front of the

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classroom. The teachers observed by the Team had prepared handouts for the Do Now activity, which reviewed previous material or set students up for the day's lesson. Students were engaged immediately upon entering their classrooms with the Do Now activity and were on task while doing these activities. The classroom teachers made the rounds to check that students understood and were able to complete the Do Now. The teachers allotted an appropriate amount of time to complete the Do Now before moving on to the daily lesson.

According to the Teacher Handbook, the unit plans are the most important elements of the curriculum. Teachers are expected to take a full class period to explain the unit plan and have students write a goals letter. A mathematics teacher provided a Team member with a copy of the mathematics unit plan on variables and patterns in algebra. The unit plan was sophisticated and rigorous: the plan contained a detailed descriptive overview, unit and mission statements, essential and guiding questions, benchmarks, multiple entry points, formative assessments and final assessment. The unit plan required students to explore the idea of variables and how two variables change relative to each other, and to seek relationships and patterns of change between the two variables. In the lesson observed, the teacher explained the unit to the students and clarified what was expected. In the Do Now activity, the students were asked what a variable was. Students were observed writing their thoughts. When asked, students explained that a variable represented a quantity or number. During the Do Now activity, the observer asked students how they knew how they were doing in math. One student replied that he was doing well on the benchmarks, getting 3's or 4's. Another student stated that math was difficult but the teacher was available to give extra help.

The Team's classroom observations confirmed that UCCS teachers use a common set of documents to structure instruction. The Veracross data management system, which is updated daily, enables school leaders and faculty to monitor the progress of any student in the school. The Team observed teachers checking on the progress of their own students in other classrooms to gather information for discussion in their morning crew session.

Most classes observed by the Team were student-centered; the Team observed no long lectures with students sitting passively listening to the teacher. The "sage on the stage" instructional approach referenced in the DOE's Year Four Site Visit Report was not observed. The Team observed consistent use of higher-level questions and rigorous content. For example, upon completion of the Do Now, one teacher led a classroom discussion using the Socratic Method. Students were learning about the role of the church in medieval Europe. Questioning went beyond the knowledge and comprehension level; students embarked on a lively discussion of whether religion was necessary, offering varying opinions.

Teachers' lessons were followed by independent and/or group work. For example, in one classroom, the activity called for four student groups. Each student had a role to fulfill such as facilitator, time manager, reporter, and materials manager. The students discussed among themselves and cooperatively chose roles.

As will be discussed later in this report, the Director of Studies visits teachers' classrooms on a regular basis, and teachers visit and conduct peer evaluations in each other's classrooms. The Team observed these practices. The Director of Studies came into a classroom to observe part of

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a lesson. In a literacy classroom, a peer teacher co-taught a lesson with classroom teacher. Team members observed that teachers easily slipped in and out of their colleagues' classrooms; the lack of disruption to the daily lessons indicated that this was a frequent practice.

The DOE's January 2006 Year Four Site Visit Report noted that in some observed classrooms, "student disruptions were a barrier to high levels of student engagement and delivery of instructional practice." The Team did not observe this to be the case; in fact, Team members noted that classroom discipline was better than average in the classrooms observed. Although there were minor distractions in some classes, these incidents did not interfere with the lessons. Nearly all students raised their hands, listened to student responses, and took turns speaking. One student told a Team member that his behavior had improved since coming to UCCS. In some observed classes, students were respectful and quiet but not always fully engaged. Students were sometimes slow to respond to the teachers' questions. During the course of the Team's site visit, many UCCS students greeted Team members by introducing themselves and shaking their hands. The Team observed that the students were polite and respectful to each other and to their teachers.

The Team also observed the Friday Forums for both the first house and the second house. At each forum, the students gathered in the cafeteria and sat on the floor; they were well behaved and engaged. The Director of Studies parsed a word and involved the students in discovering the derivation of the word, the number of syllables, the meter, the phonemes, and its relationship to other languages. He then presented "what happened this week": in the case of the first house, he provided information about the number of detentions over the last two weeks and reported on the house's progress on various activities such as vocabulary, writing complete sentences, and writing fables. Students were praised for the decline in detentions and urged to continue in that direction. The Director of Studies also announced the percentages of sixth-grade students who had reached level 2 on certain benchmarks such as writing and use of descriptive words. He solicited examples of descriptive words, rejected "great" and "good," and accepted "deplorable."

In the forum for the second house, the Head of Studies reported that only 17 percent of eighth graders had achieved level 3 or level 4 on the definition of "absolute value." A teacher then gave a physical demonstration of the meaning of "absolute value." Students indicated that they understood the definition after the demonstration. Subsequently, students and teachers were invited to offer their appreciations for the past week. Students said that they appreciated help from specific teachers, and teachers said that they appreciated work that particular students had done. A teacher offered an informative power point presentation on the origins and meaning of Friday the thirteenth through history. At the end of the presentation, the following question was posed: "Is history to blame for our thinking of Friday the thirteenth as bad luck?" A debate ensued on whether this day brings good or bad luck. All Friday Forums end with a choral recitation of the UCCS oath, which is based on an ancient Athenian oath.

17. The UCCS corridors and stairs are clean. Classrooms at UCCS are brightly painted; classroom space and supplies appeared limited but adequate for instruction. The Team saw few examples of student work on display. The school has not integrated technology into its instructional program; the school is preparing to establish a student computer laboratory with donated equipment.

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The school, which is located on two floors of a commercial building in South Boston, is clean and newly painted in some areas, although sparsely furnished; the hallway carpeting was worn and torn in several areas. The first floor corridor wall was bare in contrast to the second floor corridor wall, which had seven bulletin boards that gave the corridor some added warmth.

Conversations with staff revealed that some had painted their classrooms. The Team observed classrooms that had been painted bright orange, blue, green, and yellow, creating a welcoming atmosphere. Classroom space appeared adequate for instructional purposes, but there was insufficient space to create academic centers. All classrooms contained basic furniture such as a teacher desk, cabinet or bookcase, student desks, white boards. Desks were arranged in rows of two, in groups, or in large squares. Posted on the walls were various charts, benchmarks, and classroom rules; the Team observed few examples of student work on display.

The classrooms observed by the Team were furnished with basic classroom supplies, and teachers told the Team that supplies are adequate to meet their instructional needs. Teachers have access to equipment such as an overhead projector, TV, a projector, and heavy-duty copiers. There were no sinks in the classrooms. In addition to classrooms, UCCS has a multi-purpose room that functions as a cafeteria, a gym, and a meeting place for the weekly Friday Forum.

The school has a wireless network, and all teachers use laptops to develop unit plans and lessons and to record and view student achievement data. However, students do not have access to computers, and the Team saw no evidence that technology is integrated into the school's curriculum. The Team worked in a room with numerous uninstalled computers and monitors which, according to school administrators, were donated to UCCS and are to be used as a computer lab.

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

- 1. UCCS has grown during the current charter period, adding a grade in each of the first four years of its charter. The school’s enrollment has been lower than planned during the past two school years, a circumstance that has affected the school’s budget and educational program. UCCS Board members, staff, and parents attribute enrollment challenges in part to the school’s location outside the Uphams Corner area. The school has not maintained a waiting list each year, as required by its draft Accountability Plan.**

UCCS has added a grade each year during this charter period, growing from 80 students in its first two years to its current enrollment of 200 – the school’s charter capacity – for the current (2006-2007) school year, according to school officials. The school fell short of its planned enrollment in the last two school years. As shown in Table 8, below, UCCS had a total enrollment of 139 for the 2005-2006 school year, although the school had budgeted for 160 students, according to budget documents provided to the Team. Last year, the school had an enrollment of 191 students, less than the budget projection of 195 and the 200 enrollment authorized by the DOE. As the table shows, fifth-grade enrollment has varied significantly from year to year: after opening the school with 80 fifth graders in the 2002-2003 school year, the incoming class declined to 14 the next year, jumped up to 54 the following year, and declined to 20 last year.

**Table 8. 2002-2006 Enrollment
Uphams Corner Charter School**

Grade	2002 2003	2003 2004	2004 2005	2005 2006
5	80	14	54	20
6	--	66	45	55
7	--	--	40	53
8	--	--	--	63
Total	80	80	139	191*

Data Source: UCCS Charter Renewal Application
**Original indicates a total of 185; corrected sum comports with the DOE’s “Final FY 06 Charter School Tuition and Reimbursements.”*

UCCS officials acknowledge that the school’s lower-than-planned enrollments in the last two years have had a negative affect on the school’s budget. The school adjusted its budgeting last year and this year to base its revenue projections on 195 students, while aiming for the full complement of 200 students.

In addition, the school’s inability to successfully recruit students into the fifth grade class and retain many students through the eighth grade has raised challenges for the school’s educational program. In its Charter Renewal Application, UCCS noted:

Our program design is for all students to enter in the fifth grade and continue through to the eighth grade to experience the full effects of our school design Our internal school data show that those students who have been at the school the longest have performed the best, in many areas; the new entrants take longer, it

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seems, to fully commit to the school program. The entry of students mid-stream, as it were, has also introduced some disciplinary issues.

UCCS Board members, staff, and focus group reported to the Team that the school's location outside the Uphams Corner area is a significant factor contributing to the school's enrollment challenges; they believe that the school would be better able to enroll students if the school were located in its target neighborhood of Uphams Corner. Board members attributed the underenrollment in the 2004-2005 school year in part to the school's move further away from Uphams Corner. They also expressed the view that the school's lower-than-planned enrollment numbers reflected parents' concerns over the school's leadership transition in the 2004-2005 school year.

UCCS Board members, staff, and focus group parents also explained to the Team that recruiting fifth graders is made more difficult by the differences between the UCCS grade structure and that of the Boston Public Schools. In Boston, elementary schools run through the fifth grade, and middle schools begin in the sixth grade; thus many families do not assess alternative schools until their children are ready to enter the sixth grade.

UCCS Board members and staff agree that the school's enrollment situation has improved in the current school year. The school relies largely on recommendations from the parents of current students to recruit new students; according to Board members and staff, this strategy is generating new referrals. The school's experience is that many students do not enroll after being accepted to the school. This year the school received 240 applications and accepted all the students. At the end of the first week of school, 206 had actually enrolled, according to UCCS staff. At the time of the Team's site visit, staff indicated that enrollment was at or about the charter authorized level of 200 students.

The school's draft Accountability Plan contains the following goal: "The school will exercise sound governance." One of the ten related assessment measures is as follows:

The school will maintain a waiting list each year.

According to UCCS staff, the school does not maintain a standing waiting list; thus, it has not met this assessment measure. In the past two years, the school has accepted all students that apply based on the school's past experience that many will not actually attend the school.

- 2. UCCS has experienced operating deficits in the last two fiscal years. UCCS reported to the Team a net asset balance of \$186,004 as of June 30, 2006, the lowest level since the first fiscal year of the current charter period. The school reports that it has addressed the fiscal monitoring problems that led to the most recent operating deficit. The UCCS foundation has not raised substantial funds to date. Resource constraints have prevented the school from providing some educational services envisioned in the original charter.**

The Team examined audited financial statements for the fiscal years ending June 30, 2003; June 30, 2004; and June 30, 2005, as well as unaudited figures for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2006 provided by the school during the site visit. According to the audited financial statements, the

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school and its related foundation accumulated \$324,797 in net assets after its first year of operations and increased the school's net assets to \$443,402 in its second year of operations. However, the school incurred an operating loss of \$131,226 in fiscal year 2005, and the combined net asset balance decreased to \$319,694. According to the unaudited figures provided by the school, the school experienced an additional operating loss of \$117,030 during the fiscal year that ended June 30, 2006. The combined net asset balance for the school and its foundation as of June 30, 2006 was \$186,004, of which \$27,679 represents the value of property and equipment.

In its Management Discussion and Analysis (MDA) in the fiscal year 2005 audit report, the school attributed its fiscal year 2005 loss to lower-than-budgeted student enrollment which, the school believed, was caused in part by the school's move further away from the Uphams Corner neighborhood. The lower school enrollment resulted in the school's receiving approximately \$145,000 less revenue than planned in the budget, according to the MDA.

In interviews, the Head of School told the Team that the loss in the 2006 fiscal year was largely due to inadequate record-keeping and monitoring of revenues and expenses. He said that these problems resulted from the inexperience of the school's Business Manager at that time. Board members also reported to the Team that they did not receive accurate, timely reports last year. In response to the problems, the school hired a part-time accountant and replaced its Business Manager. The Head of School said that the poor record-keeping led to a delay in the completion of the audit from last fall to March 2006. He also said that the problems have been corrected and that the auditors completed their work on the fiscal year 2006 audit during the Team's site visit.

After raising \$28,125 in the school's first year of operation, the UCCS foundation has not been very active. No funds were raised in the school's second year; over the last two years the foundation has raised \$6,629 and \$4,000, respectively. In interviews with the Team, Board members noted that the school and foundation have not met UCCS fundraising goals in the past and said that the Board recently established a development committee to work with the foundation, building on the energy that was created through the school's Gala fundraising event at the end of last year. To assist with its fundraising efforts, UCCS hired a part-time grant writer last year. The Board told the Team that past school budgets have not planned on fundraising revenue because the school preferred to adopt a conservative budgeting approach. This year, however, the school has set a fundraising goal and has included \$100,000 of that planned revenue in the current year's budget. The school has also developed a fundraising plan for the current school year.

The school's draft Accountability Plan includes the following fundraising assessment measure under the goal of sound governance:

The Board will set and meet realistic fundraising goals, reflected in the budget.
Metric: Development Committee annual evaluation, and progress monitoring in monthly meetings.

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As noted above, the school reports that it has not met its fundraising goals in the past; thus, it has not met this measure. The school has developed a fundraising plan for the current year and has included \$100,000 of planned revenue in the budget.

UCCS has reported that resource constraints have prevented the school from providing some services envisioned in its original charter. In May 2006, the UCCS Board submitted a draft letter to the DOE requesting a series of amendments to the school's charter, some of which would eliminate initiatives that were envisioned in the school's 2002 charter application to the DOE. The school identified resources constraints as the reason for eliminating three initiatives (an apprenticeship program, a partnership with City School, and a month-long summer boarding program) and as a contributing factor in the proposed elimination of a fourth initiative (an adult literacy program).

The school's draft Accountability Plan includes the following finance assessment measure under the goal of sound governance:

The Board will approve an annual budget that meets the needs of the school, as proven by a year-end statement that spending limits were honored and revenue goals were met. *Metric: Finance Committee annual evaluation, and progress monitoring in monthly meetings.*

The Team did not receive any year-end statements from the Finance Committee showing that spending limits were honored and revenue goals were met. As noted above, revenue goals have not always been met. Thus, it appears that UCCS has not met this measure.

3. UCCS has received unqualified opinions from its auditor in each of the three fiscal years audited (2003-2005). The auditor identified a material weakness in the fiscal year 2005 audit but also reported that the problems had been addressed.

UCCS has received unqualified audit opinions in each of the independent auditor reports for the fiscal years ending June 30, 2003; June 30, 2004; and June 30, 2005. However, in its report on the fiscal year ended June 30, 2005, the school's auditor reported a material weakness in the school's internal control over financial reporting:

During 2005, monthly reconciliation of accounts, including bank reconciliations, were not prepared on a regular basis. Management hired an outside accountant to reconcile and correct the general ledger as of June 30, 2005. In addition, the Foundation's financial records were not maintained during 2005. As of June 30, 2005, the outside accountant entered all activity for the Foundation in the general ledger and reconciled its cash balance.

The school reported to the Team that the school had significant problems with its financial records during the fiscal year ending June 30, 2005. They noted that the problems delayed completion of the audit until March 2006.

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During the current charter period, UCCS received two management letters from its auditor: one was dated November 2004 and accompanied the audit report for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2004; the other was dated March 2006 and accompanied the audit report for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2005. Both management letters made current year observations and recommendations and listed prior-year items that had been addressed by the school as well as prior-year items that the school had not addressed. Both management letters identified seven prior-year recommendations that the school had not yet addressed; four of the seven recommendations in the March 2006 management letter were also listed as prior-year items in the November 2004 management letter, indicating that those recommendations had been made by the auditor but remained unaddressed by the school as documented in three years of management letters.

Both management letters concluded by recommending an implementation schedule for the auditor's recommendations. UCCS Board members and staff told the Team that the Board's Finance Committee regularly monitors the status of the implementation of auditor recommendations. The school provided the Team a copy of a spreadsheet entitled "Uphams Corner Charter School Auditor's Recommendations." The spreadsheet listed recommendations from the auditor's management letters and included columns for priority, status, target date, owner, and action taken, among other information. However, for most recommendations, the spreadsheet provided to the Team contained no entries for priority, target date, and owner, and the most recent target date listed was August 2005.

The school's draft Accountability Plan includes the following finance assessment measures under the goal of sound governance:

The school will successfully use control systems outlined in the Department of Education's Recommended Fiscal Policies and Procedures and those outlined by the independent auditor. *Metric: Finance Committee annual evaluation, and progress monitoring in monthly meetings.*

As noted earlier, the school's auditor identified a material weakness in the school's internal controls last year and reported that the situation had been rectified; in addition, auditor recommendations contained in management letters have not been implemented. Thus, UCCS has not met this assessment measure.

School audits will show unqualified opinions every year. *Metric: Annual audit.*

As noted above, the school has received unqualified opinions each year; thus, UCCS has met this assessment measure.

- 4. After a period of major turmoil in its third year, UCCS has built a new leadership structure that provides stability and security to all members of the school community. The school climate is characterized by enthusiastic support for the school and its mission, a collaborative and supportive learning environment, and a strong sense of community.**

In the third year of operations, UCCS experienced several challenging events: three Board members, a recently hired Executive Director, and three teachers resigned; the school moved to a new location, and the school's enrollment increased from 80 to 139. Since then, UCCS has hired a new Head of School, to whom the Director of Studies (who is also the Principal) and the Business Manager/Human Resources Director report. The school's founder, formerly the Headmaster, assumed the position of Director of Studies/Principal. Under the school's most recent reorganization, the Director of Studies/Principal oversees the Director of Families and Students/Assistant Principal, the teachers, and the Student Support Services Coordinator. School administrators and staff told the Team that the roles of the school's leadership team members are now clear to them. In focus group interviews with the Team, UCCS administrators, teachers, students, and parents all reported that the school's current leadership structure is providing a stable, secure environment for school operations.

The school's draft Accountability Plan contains assessment measure pertaining to management and leadership under the goal of sound governance:

The school will maintain clarity of roles and responsibility among all staff.

The assessment measure provides no indication of how progress toward this measure is to be evaluated. Nevertheless, school administrators and staff interviewed by the Team believe that staff roles and responsibilities have been clarified.

All of those interviewed by the Team expressed enthusiasm for the school and its mission; all described the school culture as collaborative and supportive. The Team saw ample evidence of the school's supportive community environment and shared sense of commitment during interviews, classroom observations, and informal interactions with members of the school community during the course of the three-day site visit.

- 5. At the time of the Team's visit, UCCS records showed that all but two of the school's 17 teachers had college or graduate degrees; those two teachers were not Highly Qualified under the provisions of the No Child Left Behind Act. One other teacher did not meet the federal requirement for subject matter competence, according to the school. Most teachers have been employed at the school for less than two years. The school's teacher turnover rate declined by more than 50 percent after the fourth year.**

As of the date of the Team's site visit, UCCS employed 17 teachers, 13 of whom teach in core academic subjects, 3 of whom teach Special Education, and one of whom teaches Physical Education. The school provided a table summarizing the qualifications and tenure of these teachers. The table shows that eight teachers have master's degrees, seven have bachelor's degrees, and two do not have a bachelor's degree. The two teachers without bachelor's degrees teach core academic subjects and are not highly qualified under state or federal requirements. In

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four other instances it is questionable, based on the information provided to the team, whether the teachers meet the federal subject matter competence requirement because it is unclear that the subject matter of the degrees listed correspond to the core subject matters taught by the teachers. In two of those four instances, the information provided to the team indicates that the teachers are certified, although the area of the certification is not indicated.

Of the 17 teachers on staff, five are first-year teachers, eight are second-year teachers, and the remaining four teachers have taught at the school for two to four years. UCCS has experienced very high rates of teacher turnover in recent years: 80 percent of teachers did not return to the school after the second year, and 63 percent of teachers did not return to the school after the third year. However, the teacher turnover rate for the most recent year was significantly lower: 29 percent of teachers did not return after the fourth year. The UCCS Charter Renewal Application provides the following explanation of the school's successful effort to reduce the teacher turnover rate:

We have had teacher turnover typical of charter schools; as is also typical of charter schools, most of our hires are near the beginning of their teaching careers. This lack of experience leads to classroom management issues that in turn affect student achievement more broadly. In Year Four, we instituted an expanded professional development program and significantly increased common planning time for teachers to pursue individual learning and work as colleagues toward common goals. While revising this schedule slightly in Year Five, we plan to continue to emphasize on professional development to enhance the skills of our teachers.

- 6. UCCS has instituted a strong professional development program. The school's comprehensive Teacher Performance Evaluation System (TPES) provides rubrics for the skills and knowledge required to be a competent teacher and is supplemented by other performance evaluation techniques. UCCS has met the measure contained in its draft Accountability Plan regarding teacher quality.**

Through interviews with school leaders and faculty, the Team learned that UCCS has a strong and well-developed professional development program. Each school year begins with a two and one-half week "summer residency" for teachers. The professional development agenda for this program is developed by the Principal's Team (which consists of the Director of Studies/Principal, Assistant Principal, and Director of Student Support) and includes goals for the school year, continued work on fostering a culture of collegiality, writing and rewriting benchmarks, critiquing and rewriting benchmark units and lesson plans, and co-norming rubrics. Each year, specific aspects of the agenda are highlighted, depending on the number of new and returning staff and an evaluation of the previous year's accomplishments and challenges.

UCCS schedules focused professional development sessions throughout the school year. Twice a year, teachers gather with the Principal's Team on a mini-retreat for one and one-half days; in addition, the school holds weekly faculty meetings on Wednesday afternoons to discuss instructional strategies. Individual departments also meet weekly with the Principal to assess and critique strategies related to instruction and to discuss assessment and curriculum issues; they

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also meet weekly with the Assistant Principal to discuss classroom management and culture issues.

In the Team's view, the school's professional development program is exemplary with respect to its structure and depth as well as the time devoted to professional development during the summer and throughout the school year. In interviews with the Team, school leaders expressed confidence that the school's professional development program will enable UCCS to achieve its mission and the goals outlined in its draft Accountability Plan.

UCCS uses a comprehensive Teacher Performance Evaluation System (TPES) developed over the past three years by the school faculty, the Director of Studies, and an outside consultant. The TPES provides teaching rubrics, goals and objectives, practice structures, and policies that provide a clear and specific set of expectations for UCCS teachers. The school uses the TPES for both teacher development and teacher assessment. As will be discussed, UCCS has disseminated the TPES to district schools in Boston and charter schools statewide.

Teachers receive formal, detailed, written evaluations twice a year based on the TPES. These evaluations identify strengths as well as weaknesses and include specific suggestions for improvement. In interviews with the Team, teachers reported that the written evaluations do not contain surprises because the teachers receive continuous feedback during the school year. Teachers receive and perform 10 peer evaluations each year on a form provided for this purpose. Administrators and teachers visit classrooms unannounced on "teaching rounds" to observe and provide feedback to teachers. In addition, teachers routinely visit each other's classrooms on an informal basis to learn how their colleagues are handling difficult classes or students. The Team observed teachers visiting each other's classroom and even pitching in to help when needed.

The school's draft Accountability Plan contains the following goal: "The school will exercise sound governance." One related assessment measure under this goal concerns teacher quality:

Each teacher retained at the school will have a rating of satisfactory or above on their Annual Review. *Metric: Annual review, conducted by the Headmaster and based upon rubrics from the school's Teacher Performance Evaluation System.*

The Team confirmed that UCCS has met this measure. According to the Director of Studies, two teachers received unsatisfactory ratings last year; these teachers were not retained.

7. The teachers at UCCS are engaged and committed. They appreciate and support the school's strong culture of improvement. Although they are concerned about poor student performance on the MCAS exams, they also expressed confidence that the school can successfully use its internal benchmarks to improve academic performance.

The Team met with UCCS teachers in two focus groups: the first group consisted of two science teachers and one mathematics teacher; the second group consisted of four teachers of Special Education, social studies, physical education, and Latin. The teachers interviewed by the Team were engaged and committed to UCCS and its mission. They expressed the view that UCCS has a strong, supportive culture of improvement. They said that the school's administration solicits their input and involves them in the hiring of new teachers, who are initiated into this culture of

improvement by returning teachers and administrators. The teaching schedule, which requires teachers to teach four classes per six-period day, provides time for planning and visiting other teachers' classrooms. Science and math teachers plan together as do literacy, rhetoric, and social studies teachers.

The teachers told the Team that they are aware that their students are not performing well on the MCAS exams, especially on the mathematics exams, but that they feel that their students are making progress based on other assessments and performance in the classroom. They said that students enter UCCS with low skills and then improve. If students stay at UCCS for four years, according to the teachers, they are able to progress academically to an appropriate level. Teachers regard the use of portfolios for authentic assessment as a major accomplishment. They told the Team that both they and the students are held to high standards.

Teachers reported using data from MCAS exams and other external assessments to pinpoint what students do not know and to improve instruction. They praised the MPSP (discussed earlier in this report), which provides rapid feedback to teachers. They indicated that the MPSP has enabled them to help students understand and feel more comfortable with the MCAS format. However, one teacher noted that teachers at UCCS do not teach to the MCAS exams; they teach to the UCCS benchmarks.

8. UCCS students participating on the Student Senate feel engaged in and proud of the school. They reported that the teachers are supportive and effective and expressed the view that the school is academically strong. They were able to articulate the meaning of “rhetoric,” describe the school’s approach to discipline, and discuss the school’s community service program.

The Team met with 17 members of the Student Senate: one fifth-grader, four sixth-graders, eight seventh-graders, and four eighth-graders. To serve on the Student Senate, students must write a paragraph explaining what they will do to help the school; they then run for election by their classmates. These students voiced positive opinions of the school as a fun and supportive place where they have many friends, where they are respected for their opinions, and where they are supported by teachers and administrators. They said that teachers help them, rather than simply giving them textbooks to read. Several said that they had anticipated a “robotic” educational environment of students sitting in silent rows but that they had found “just the opposite” at UCCS. The students are proud of the fact that the Student Senate works with UCCS administrators to solve problems and run the school: for example, the Student Senate requested a soccer program, and its request was granted.

In the students' view, their teachers are effective, and UCCS is performing well academically, as evidenced by the fact that some graduates of the school attend prestigious high schools. The students regard the curriculum as rigorous: they know that they must pass the internal benchmarks, which they regard as more challenging than the MCAS exams. They talked about being able to “get it right” eventually by working hard to earn a 3 on a benchmark.

The students explained that “rhetoric” means thinking about something, deciding how one feels about it, and then using language to explain oneself. One student defined “rhetoric” as “learning

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how to use words to get what you want.” They said that the school’s rhetoric program entails learning different languages such as Latin in order to learn the roots of words. They pointed out to the Team that the “welcome” sign that they had made for the Team was written in different languages. They noted that UCCS teachers and administrators reinforce the principles of rhetoric. For example, they cited the Friday Forums, at which students show their work, make presentations, talk about what needs to be changed in the school, and parse the “word of the day.”

The students said that UCCS has become more structured, more organized, and safer than in previous years. Students who had not been doing homework are now doing homework or receiving detention if they do not. They described in detail the school’s approach to progressive discipline and the importance of discipline to the entire school community.

When asked about community involvement, the students discussed June Term, the two-week period of half-days in June when students undertake community service projects in Uphams Corner. Students explained that they complete a survey identifying what they would like to do during June Term, they complete the work, and they then report on their work.

As noted earlier in this report, UCCS students were courteous and welcoming to the Team. Many greeted Team members by shaking their hands in the school classrooms and hallways. The school has a student dress code to which most students observed by the Team conformed.

9. UCCS parents expressed very positive views of the school’s teachers, administration, and environment. They said that the school’s rhetoric program has increased their children’s ability to think and express themselves clearly and has boosted their self-confidence. They feel engaged in and supported by the school. They firmly believe that UCCS is academically successful.

The Team met with a focus group consisting of eight parents with children in all four grades, including the parent of a special needs student and a student on a 504 Plan. Most parents had sent their children to UCCS for two to three years, although some were new to the school. The focus group parents praised the willingness of UCCS teachers to work with them and their children; teachers know their students, and students know their teachers. They said that the school provides their children with tutoring that focuses on students’ individual needs.

In response to a question about rhetoric-based education, the parents told the Team that the school’s rhetoric focus has helped their children become better thinkers and express themselves more effectively. They said that their children are learning that it is all right to ask for help or to speak up and say, “I don’t understand.” They also believe that the rhetoric program has boosted their children’s confidence.

The parents said that UCCS welcomes and works with parents. The school communicates with the parents through weekly progress reports as well as through email; parents are also encouraged to visit the school and to volunteer at the school. The Team reviewed letters sent to parents by the school; these letters requested parent volunteers and listed a number of volunteer

opportunities for parents. The parents also said that they had requested that the school provide telephone coverage early and late in the day and that the school had met their request.

The focus group parents expressed the strong conviction that UCCS is academically successful. One parent said that UCCS had performed better on the MCAS exams than some other charter schools. Another parent said that students had improved by one to three grade levels. The parents said that they receive a quarterly syllabus and that they knew that their children were required to pass the school's internal benchmarks. They said that the students are assigned challenging homework that they complete without resistance.

UCCS has a Parent Council that has not been strong in the past but reportedly is showing promise this year. The school held a fundraising Gala in June 2006 to which every UCCS parent was invited. The Gala generated energy and excitement among parents, 25 of whom attended the last Parent Council meeting.

10. UCCS administrators, teachers, students, and parents feel that UCCS is a safe and secure environment. While on site, the Team noted some safety issues.

All UCCS participants interviewed by the Team stated that they feel very safe in the school building. Teachers said that they know all of the students and have never felt unsafe. Some parents told the Team that they had had initial reservations about sending their children to a school in South Boston because of its reputation but that they now feel comfortable with the school's location. They noted that their children sometimes encounter problems while riding the Boston school buses, over which UCCS has no control.

The Team noted several safety concerns while working on site. The doors of the school were occasionally unlocked and unmonitored, allowing Team members to enter the building unobserved. The school shares a common entry with other tenants, and access to the first floor of the school is unmonitored; the school's administrative offices are at the front of the second floor. In addition, a stairway located at the back of the building and labeled for emergency use only was in regular use during the day.

11. The UCCS Board of Trustees meets regularly and in the last two years has been appropriately engaged in school governance. Recently, the Board has added new members, thereby reaching for the first time the minimum membership required by the school's bylaws. The Board has worked to strengthen its governance capacity and processes.

The UCCS bylaws contain the following provision: "The Board of Directors shall consist of at least nine (9) Directors and no more than fifteen (15) Directors."¹ The school's draft Accountability Plan includes the following related assessment measure under the sound governance goal:

The Board will maintain a full complement of membership.

¹ Although the UCCS bylaws refer to the "Board of Directors," M.G.L. c. 71, §89 provides that charter schools are governed by boards of trustees.

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The UCCS Board consisted of fewer than nine members until recently, when the Board succeeded in recruiting additional active members. The current Board consists of 10 members; thus, UCCS has now met the above-cited assessment measure. All 10 members are interested volunteers; none are parents of UCCS students.

The Team's review of the minutes of Board meetings held over the past three years shows that the Board has met regularly – almost every month during the school year and sometimes more often – and has been actively engaged in the school's affairs. The Team's review found that the Board regularly receives reports from Board subcommittees and staff; the meeting minutes show that the Board monitors, discusses, and votes on academic, administrative, and financial matters affecting school operations. The Board has five active subcommittees: finance, which meets regularly; governance; facilities; accountability; development; and a new subcommittee on student achievement.

Eight members of the UCCS Board participated in discussions with the Team during the site visit. These discussions confirmed that the Board members understand the school's culture and are well informed about school matters. The Board members expressed the belief that the school is on track academically and financially, having weathered challenges of a leadership transition and problems with financial reporting. They also discussed a variety of recent and continuing issues confronting the school, including the need for a facility in the Uphams Corner area; enrollment problems that concern parent satisfaction and student recruitment and retention; adjustments necessitated by the school's growing population of Special Education students; student discipline; and the school's revenue needs, including improved fundraising. When asked if they knew of the school's recent MCAS results, all members indicated that they did. They expressed their disappointment in the results, identified some of the challenges the school faces (including the school's large population of low-income students and students whose first language is not English), and expressed the belief that improved academic performance will result from recent changes implemented by the school, including the recently completed curriculum. They also discussed the school's efforts to focus on improvement in mathematics at the school.

The Board members reported that the Board sets annual objectives for the Head of School and conducts annual evaluations of his performance. The Team reviewed material relating to the most recent evaluation.

The Board has worked to strengthen its governance capacity and processes with the assistance of a consultant from the Executive Service Corps. The Board's governance subcommittee successfully identified and recruited new Board members with expertise relevant to the school's need. The Board recently has engaged in a strategic planning process and conducted a retreat on the weekend prior to the Team's site visit. The Board told the Team that now that the school's pressing administrative issues have been addressed, the Board can focus on other issues. The Board members indicated that they are focusing on locating a new facility for the school in Uphams Corner, branding and marketing the school in order to improve fundraising and recruiting, and revenue generation, among other issues.

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The school's draft Accountability Plan includes the following Board-related measure under the sound governance goal:

The Board will conduct an annual review and receive a finding of "satisfactory."
Metric: Annual board survey, designed by the Governance Committee with input from outside expertise, and agreed upon by the Board.

The Team obtained and reviewed the Board's Development Assessment conducted at the end of the last school year. The Assessment asked each member to indicate the extent of agreement with statements under ten issue areas: Mission/Policy Bylaws, Programs and Services, Planning, Board Operations and Organization, Membership, Fundraising, Financial Management, Board-Staff Relations, President-Board Relationship, Public Relations. No formal interpretation or conclusion was provided to the Team. The tallied responses and summarized comments indicate that while the five respondents varied in their individual assessments, the overall assessment was positive. Thus, the school appears to have met this assessment measure.

12. The UCCS Board of Trustees has not fully complied with the requirements of the open meeting law.

The open meeting law, M.G.L. c. 30A, §11A½, requires governmental bodies to maintain accurate minutes of all meetings, including executive sessions and subcommittee meetings. The minutes of each meeting must, at minimum, set forth the date, time, and place of the meeting, the identity of the Board members who are present or absent, and all action taken. The Attorney General's *Open Meeting Law Guidelines* state that "action taken" has been interpreted to mean "not only votes and other formal decisions made at a meeting, but also discussion or consideration of issues for which no vote is taken or final determination is made." The UCCS Board has not kept minutes of all executive sessions and subcommittee meetings as required by the open meeting law.

At the Team's request, UCCS provided copies of all minutes of Board meetings held between October 17, 2003 and September 21, 2006. The minutes show that the Board convened six executive sessions during this three-year period but that the Board did not prepare minutes for five of the executive sessions it convened. In one case, the regular meeting minutes list a vote taken in executive session; in three cases, the regular meeting minutes reference the Board's discussion in executive sessions.

According to the Board meeting minutes provided to the Team, the six executive sessions were convened for the following purposes:

- To discuss "personnel matters," including a policy governing performance evaluations for staff.
- To discuss the process regarding the Headmaster's annual review.
- To discuss appointing the interim Executive Director to the permanent position of Executive Director.

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- To discuss the performance and compensation of the Business Manager.
- To discuss the report of the Accountability Subcommittee on the headmaster evaluation.
- To discuss the annual head of school evaluation process.

These stated purposes do not fall within the seven specific purposes for which an executive session may be convened under the open meeting law. One such purpose is to discuss the “reputation, character, physical condition or mental health rather than the professional competence” of a particular individual. (It should be noted that the law affords certain rights to an individual who is the subject of a discussion at an executive session called for this purpose.) While the Board minutes indicate that some executive sessions were convened to discuss the professional competence of certain school staff, the minutes do not indicate that these executive sessions were convened to discuss issues pertaining to “reputation, character, physical condition or mental health rather than the professional competence” of the staff. The seven allowable purposes of executive sessions do not include discussion of personnel policies or performance evaluation procedures.

In an email message to the Team, the UCCS Board Chair confirmed that the Board has not maintained minutes of subcommittee meetings: “Typically, subcommittees have not kept separate minutes but reported their activities at the full board meeting and had them included in the minutes that way.” The Board minutes do provide information on subcommittee briefings provided to the full Board at the regular Board meetings. However, this approach does not conform to the requirements of the open meeting law, which requires Board subcommittees to maintain accurate minutes of their meetings.

13. The UCCS current bylaws do not fully comport with DOE requirements for charter school bylaws and with state law.

The DOE’s Charter School Bylaws Checklist contains a number of required provisions for charter school bylaws. The current UCCS bylaws do not contain many of these provisions. For example, they do not state that the school is a public school chartered by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts; they do not reference M.G.L. c. 71, §89, the charter school law; they do not state that the Board of Trustees is a public entity; they do not state that Board members are considered special state employees, and they do not contain the nondiscrimination provision required by the DOE. It should also be noted that the UCCS bylaws contain numerous references to the “Board of Directors,” whereas the charter school law provides that charter schools are governed by “boards of trustees.”

In addition, the UCCS bylaws contain a provision that is inconsistent with the open meeting law as well as the DOE’s Charter School Bylaws Checklist. Article IV, Section 6 of the UCCS bylaws states:

Any action required to be taken by the Board of Directors may be taken without a meeting if all Directors consent in writing to such action. Such written consent or consents shall be filed with the minutes of the proceedings of the Board of

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Directors. Such action or written consent shall have the same force and effect as a unanimous vote of the Board of Directors.

This provision does not comport with the requirements of the state's open meeting law. According to the Attorney General's *Open Meeting Law Guidelines*:

Like private conversations held in person or over the telephone, e-mail conversations among a quorum of members of a governmental body that relate to public business violate the Open Meeting Law, as the public is deprived of the opportunity to attend and monitor the e-mail "meeting." Thus it is a violation to e-mail to a quorum messages that can be considered invitations to reply in any medium, and would amount to deliberation on business that must occur only at proper meetings.

Consistent with the open meeting law, the DOE's Charter School Bylaws Checklist requires that trustee participation occur in person for the purpose of a quorum or a vote; it prohibits charter school bylaws from allowing members to participate in meetings by email.

Finally, the Team noted that Article XIII of the school's bylaws states:

These Bylaws may be amended at a regular meeting by a two-thirds vote of all Directors then in office; provided that notice of the proposed amendment, together with a copy thereof, is mailed to each Director at least fifteen (15) days prior to the meeting at which the amendment is to be considered.

DOE regulations, 603 CMR 1.11, require that any amendments to a Board's bylaws be submitted to the Commissioner of Education for approval. The DOE's Charter School Bylaws Checklist requires charter school bylaws to specify a procedure for bylaw amendments, subject to the approval of the Board of Trustees and the DOE.

14. There is a disparity between the UCCS community's positive perceptions of the school's academic progress and the school's results to date.

The Team found that all of those interviewed – including the UCCS Board, leadership, teachers, students, and parents – share the conviction that UCCS students have made significant academic progress. This conviction is also reflected in the school's Charter Renewal Application, which states: "The data from internal and external academic assessments indicate significant improvement in student performance in both English and math assessments." As previously discussed, the school's MCAS exam results to date do not show evidence of academic progress by UCCS students.

Similarly, the school's Charter Renewal Application also contains a statement that was echoed in the Team's discussions with UCCS Board and staff members: "Our internal school data show that those students who have been at the school the longest have performed the best, in many areas: the new entrants take longer, it seems, to fully commit to the school program." At the Team's request, the school provided the internal data referenced in the foregoing statement. The data consisted of average scaled GRADE scores for each school cohort from the spring 2006 test

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administration. The data showed that the seventh- and eighth-graders who had been at UCCS for two years (as of spring 2006) achieved higher average scaled scores than those who had been at UCCS for one year. However, the data also showed that the average scaled score for eighth-graders who had been at UCCS for four years was identical to the score achieved by eighth-graders who had been at UCCS for one year.

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

- 1. The UCCS curriculum, instruction, and culture support and promote the school's mission. UCCS offers an academically rigorous, rhetoric-centered, college preparatory program that has been strengthened since the DOE's site visit in December 2005. The school has not yet achieved sufficient improvement in student performance, as measured by MCAS scores and other external assessment data.**

The UCCS mission is as follows: "Uphams Corner Charter School offers an academically rigorous, rhetoric-centered education in the liberal arts and sciences, leading to sound understanding, earnest reflection, self-discipline, integrity, and action. Our community is devoted to outstanding student performance and whole character formation. We will graduate all our students as powerful, articulate, moral citizens, working for the benefit of all."

As promised in the school's 2002 charter application, UCCS offers an academically rigorous, rhetoric-centered, college preparatory program. During the first charter period, and especially since the DOE's most recent site visit report in January 2006, UCCS has developed a full curriculum as well as a clear, detailed, effective set of internal benchmarks and rubrics that reflect the school's mission to provide a rhetoric-centered education. All school participants interviewed and observed by the Team understood the role of rhetoric in the school's academic program. The school community's commitment to providing academic and moral support to the student population is evident. Moreover, the school has addressed and brought under control the serious discipline problems that threatened the academic and social climate of the school earlier in the current charter period.

The learning environment and internal assessment systems created by the mission-driven efforts of the UCCS Board and staff offer the potential for improved academic performance on the part of UCCS students. Thus far, however, these accomplishments have not translated into improved student test scores on MCAS exams and other external assessments.

- 2. UCCS has met approximately 20 percent of the assessment measures outlined in its draft Accountability Plan.**

The school's draft Accountability Plan contains four goals and 21 related assessment measures. Of the eight assessment measures pertaining to the goal of student proficiency in the liberal arts, UCCS came close to meeting the sole MCAS-related measure of competence in writing, but it did not meet six other assessment measures under this goal. The school did not report out the data necessary to determine whether one measure pertaining to the student proficiency goal was met.

UCCS did not meet the two assessment measures pertaining to the goal of student proficiency in the art and practice of rhetoric because, according to the Director of Studies, the projects required by these measures were not assigned to students. Similarly, UCCS did not meet the assessment measure pertaining to the goal of student character formation because the related rubrics were not used in the third and fourth years of the current charter period. According to the

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Director of Studies, UCCS intends to implement and track student progress on all three of these assessment measures in the next charter period.

UCCS met four of the nine assessment measures pertaining to the goal of sound governance. The school did not meet five of these measures. The draft Accountability Plan provides no methodology for assessing the school's performance relative to the fifth assessment measure under this goal: "The school will maintain clarity of roles and responsibility among all staff." However, as noted earlier, school administrators and staff indicated to the Team that staff roles and responsibilities are clear.

3. UCCS has requested approval from the DOE to eliminate some initiatives from the school's charter.

In May 2006, the UCCS Board submitted a draft letter to the DOE requesting a series of amendments to the school's charter. Some of the requested amendments would eliminate initiatives that were envisioned in the 2002 charter application submitted to the DOE: an apprenticeship program, a partnership with City School, a partnership with the Uphams Corner Health Center, an adult literacy program, and a month-long summer boarding program. Each of these is briefly discussed below.

Apprenticeship. The school's 2002 charter application cited "apprenticeship" as one of the five educational formats to be instituted by UCCS as a means of helping students see and use the connections between thought and action. The UCCS Board's May 2006 draft letter to the DOE provided the following explanation for the requested amendment: "The resources were not available to enable this format to be provided; its absence does not impact the educational mission in a significant manner."

Partnership with City School. The school's 2002 charter application expressed the intention to partner with the City School, an organization running term-time and summer workshops to engage students in public policy work; however, the UCCS Board's May 2006 draft letter to the DOE stated: "The resources have not been available to enable this program to be provided."

Partnership with the Uphams Corner Health Center. The school's 2002 charter application envisioned that the Uphams Corner Health Center would provide students and families with extracurricular support. The UCCS Board's May 2006 draft letter to the DOE stated: "This was provided in the first two years but not since; the school's location outside a close proximity to the Center is a key factor."

Adult literacy classes. The school's 2002 charter application cited plans to offer adult literacy classes at the school within the first year of operation. The UCCS Board's May 2006 draft letter to the DOE stated: "The resources have not been available to enable this program to be provided, and the location of the school outside a close proximity to the Uphams Corner community is another key factor."

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Summer boarding program. The school's charter application expressed the founders' intention to develop a month-long summer program for all students. The Board's May 2006 draft letter stated: "Resources have not been sufficient to offer this program, although it remains a goal."

4. UCCS has undertaken limited dissemination efforts during the current charter period.

The charter school law, M.G.L. c. 71, §89(II), requires commonwealth charter school to provide "models for replication and best practices to the commissioner and to other public schools in the district where the charter school is located." According to the school's Charter Renewal Application and other information reported by the school, UCCS has disseminated information on its Teacher Performance Evaluation System to district schools in Boston and charter schools statewide, and presented on the subject of science education for urban students at the National Science Teachers Association's 2004 conference.

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

- 1. The Accountability Plan proposed by UCCS for the next charter period proposed by UCCS contains only one MCAS-related assessment measure. Several other assessment measures contained in the proposed Accountability Plan are problematic.**

The DOE's *Guidelines for Writing Charter School Accountability Plans* specify that a school's Accountability Plan should measure the most critical areas of the school's performance and should not attempt to measure all of the work performed by a charter school. Accordingly, the *Guidelines* encourage charter schools to "articulate a limited number of clear, critical, and carefully measured goals." The *Guidelines* set forth four general standards that a charter school Accountability Plan should meet: the plan should be rigorous and realistic, it should be measurable, it should measure outcomes rather than inputs, and it should be focused and manageable. The Accountability Plan proposed by UCCS² does not meet these standards in some areas.

- 1a. The proposed Accountability Plan devotes insufficient attention to the critical area of student performance on the MCAS exams.**

All public schools in Massachusetts are required to demonstrate AYP; to date, UCCS has not met this requirement. Improved student performance on the MCAS exams is thus critical to the survival and ultimate success of UCCS. However, the school's proposed Accountability Plan contains only one MCAS-related assessment measure: "Two-thirds of students will show competence in writing, as defined by a score of at least 6 in the composition section of the seventh-grade MCAS."

UCCS must improve student performance on the MCAS ELA and mathematics exams, and must make AYP each year, whether or not its Accountability Plan requires it to do so. Given the school's weak performance on these MCAS exams to date, incorporating meaningful MCAS-related assessment measures into its Accountability Plan would serve to focus the attention of the UCCS Board, leadership, and faculty on the urgency of improving student performance on the MCAS exams.

- 1b. Two assessment measures of academic progress require UCCS to track and report out data on average GRADE scores of successive classes over time, but the school has instead tracked and reported changes in median GRADE scores by grade for these measures.**

The school's proposed Accountability Plan contains the following assessment measure in the areas of literacy and mathematics:

² As previously noted, the goals and assessment measures contained in the Accountability Plan proposed by UCCS for the next charter period are identical to those contained in the draft Accountability Plan that the school has used since May 2005.

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Each successive class will achieve a higher average score on a nationally normed reading test/mathematics test than the class of the previous year, for the term of this Accountability Plan. *Metric: GRADE, administered annually.*

Each successive class will achieve a higher average score on a nationally normed mathematics test than the class of the previous year, for the term of this Accountability Plan. *Metric: Iowa Tests of Basic Skills.*

As discussed earlier in this report, the school's Charter Renewal Application addresses these assessment measures by reporting out data on median reading GRADE score increases and decreases and median ITBS score increases and decreases over time in showing the school's progress toward these measures. However, these measures require the school to report out data on average, or mean, GRADE and ITBS scores, rather than changes in median GRADE and ITBS scores. Either the assessment measures should be revised to reflect the school's intended data comparisons or the school should collect and report out the data corresponding to the assessment measures. In addition, it is unclear whether the phrase "each successive class" is intended to require comparisons of the scores of individual cohorts over time or comparisons of the scores of successive classes over time. In order for these measures to be usable by UCCS, the methodology for measuring progress toward them requires clarification.

1c. Several assessment measures appear unrealistic.

The school's proposed Accountability Plan contains the following assessment measures pertaining to student performance in the areas of science, social science, and classics:

All students will meet predetermined promotion goals in science. *Metric: Teacher-derived rubrics.*

All students will meet predetermined promotion goals in social science. *Metric: Teacher-derived rubrics.*

All students will demonstrate Stage I proficiency in Latin, as defined by the Classical and Modern Language Frameworks. *Metric: Teacher-derived rubrics, based on goals approved by an outside committee.*

In the 2005-2006 academic year, 14 percent of UCCS students failed science, 11 percent failed social science, and 10 percent failed Latin. These failure rates suggest that the above-cited assessment measures – which require all UCCS students to pass science, social science and Latin – may not be appropriate targets for UCCS. A more realistic set of measures could require improvement in these areas: e.g., increases in the percentages of students meeting the school's promotion goals in these subject areas over time.

In addition, the proposed Accountability Plan contains the following assessment measure pertaining to the school's management and leadership:

The school will meet the terms of this Accountability Plan each year.

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Given the school's performance to date relative to the same assessment measures contained in the proposed Accountability Plan, the above-cited assessment measure is not realistic. Moreover, it is not a focused, useful measure of the effectiveness of the school's leadership, which does not fully control the school's performance relative to some assessment measures contained in the proposed Accountability Plan, such as those relating to Board governance.

1d. One assessment measure is not quantifiable as written.

The school's proposed Accountability Plan contains the following assessment measure of management and leadership:

The school will maintain clarity of roles and responsibility of all staff.

The proposed Accountability Plan does not indicate how UCCS plans to measure progress toward this measure, which is not quantifiable as written.

2. The UCCS Board has initiated a strategic planning process but has not yet developed a comprehensive action plan with implementation timelines to guide the school during the next charter period. UCCS is continuing to seek a new facility that will enable the school to relocate to its target neighborhood of Uphams Corner. The Board is also focusing branding, marketing, and generating additional revenue to support the school.

The UCCS Board has developed a set of strategic objectives and a list of key issues corresponding to each strategic objective and recently met in a full-day retreat to continue their planning. The next step will be to produce a comprehensive action plan with specific targets and implementation deadlines to serve as a guide for school operations over the next five years. The strategic objectives and key issues that have been identified by the Board are appropriate, although they do not explicitly identify improvement of the school's performance on the MCAS exams and other external assessments as an objective or issue. The Board members indicated to the Team that they are focusing on locating a new facility for the school in Uphams Corner, branding and marketing the school in order to improve fundraising and recruiting, and revenue generation.

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**APPENDIX
SCHEDULE OF THE
UPHAMS CORNER CHARTER SCHOOL
RENEWAL INSPECTION VISIT**

**Day 1
Wednesday, October 11, 2006**

TIME	PERIOD	Inspector 1	Inspector 2	Inspector 3
7:30		Team Meeting		
8:30	SSR	Orientation with School Personnel		
8:50	1	Parent Focus Group		
9:55	2	Obs 1 Gouvea 113 Social 6-1	Obs 2 Waterbury Caf PE 7-2	Obs 3 Chamb. 206 Lit 7-3
11:00	3	Obs 4 Shah 112 Math 7-3	Obs 5 Horne 210 Science 8-1	Obs 6 Murray 209 Math 6-2
12:10	LUNCH			
12:40	4	Obs 7 McGrath 107 Literacy 6-1	Student Focus Group Student Senate	
1:45	5	Focus Group: Head of School, Principal Edward M. Cook, Head of School Michael Mayo, Principal and Founder		
2:50	6	Teacher Focus Group Jessica Evans (Science), Lauren Horne (Science), Amy Shah (Math)		Obs 8 Gray 207 Latin 7-3
3:30		On-site Document Review, Interviews		
4:15		Corporate Review or Interviews		
5:00		Close		

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Day 2
Thursday, October 12, 2006

TIME	PERIOD	Inspector 1	Inspector 2	Inspector 3	Inspector 4
7:30		Team Meeting			
8:30	SSR	Leadership Team Interview, Part I			
		Edward M. Cook (Head of School), Michael Mayo (Principal and Founder), Francois Fils-Aime (Assistant Principal), Elizabeth Castellana (Student Support Services Director), Joan Mark-Bell (Business Manager)			
8:50	1	Board of Directors Interview			
		Christopher Binns (chair), Desiree Baynes, Paul Bowen, Anne Lynch, Bill Collins, Stephen Leahy, Molly Scherm, Steve Rumpler.			
9:55	2	Obs 9 Dare 106 Literacy 5	Obs 10 Murray 209 Math 8-2	Obs 11 Gray 207 Latin 7-1	Document Review
11:00	3	Obs 12 Roberts-Morris 108 Sub. Separate	Obs 13 Stripinis 208 Rhetoric 7-1	Obs 14 Evans213 Science 6-1	Document Review
12:10	LUNCH				
12:40	4	Teacher Focus Group			Document Review
		Phil Murray (Math), Valquiria Gouvea (Social Studies), Elizabeth Gray (Social Studies and Latin), Megan Waterbury (Physical Education), Lenny Bradford (Music)			
1:45	5	Follow-Up Document Review		Interview with Business and Finance Joan Mark-Bell, Business Manager Bill Manburg, CPA Edward M. Cook, Head of School	
2:50	6	Leadership Team Interview, Part II Document Review			
3:30		Corporate Review or Interviews			
5:00		Close			

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Day 3
Friday, October 12, 2006

TIME	PERIOD	Inspector 1	Inspector 2	Inspector 3	Inspector 4	Inspector 5
7:30		Team Meeting				
8:30	1	Obs Friday Forum		Corporate Review		
9:45	2	Corporate Review		Obs Friday Forum		Corporate Review
10:15	3	Corporate Review				
12:10	4	Lunch				
12:40	5	Corporate Review				
3:00		Close				