

Panel Report
Candidate Compass School Review
Community Day Charter Public School
Lawrence, Massachusetts

INTRODUCTION

The Program

The Commonwealth Compass Schools Program is one part of the Massachusetts School and District Accountability System. The purpose of the Compass Schools Program is to recognize and celebrate improvement in Massachusetts' schools, and to disseminate information and encourage networking and sharing of ideas, effective practices, and models for success. The program is intended to provide a means for the schools to share their expertise with other schools in the state.

In 2005, 197 schools that made AYP during the last two years and exceeded their improvement targets for both ELA and mathematics in the aggregate and/or for all reported subgroups were invited to apply to the program. Eighty of those schools chose to apply by submitting completed applications. The applications provided written responses to three questions on the initiatives undertaken to improve student performance that school leaders and staff think have had the most positive impact on their students' performance. Six high schools, six elementary schools, one middle school, one kindergarten through grade 8 school, one grade 7 through 12 regional school, and one charter school were selected as finalists. Those 16 schools were scheduled for a panel review to learn more about their highlighted programs and to determine their willingness and capacity to serve in the program. Data and information gathered from the application and review processes of these schools will be published in a report this fall.

The Commissioner will designate up to 16 schools to serve as 2005 Commonwealth Compass Schools. Compass Schools receive special recognition and a \$10,000 grant to support the participation of their administrators and staff in information sharing and dissemination activities over the next year.

The Report

This report summarizes the findings of a team of two Department of Education evaluators, one from the School Performance Evaluation unit and one from the Charter School Office during a one-day visit to the Community Day Charter Public School on June 6, 2005. The report will assist the Commissioner in determining which schools from among those visited will be designated to serve as 2005 Commonwealth Compass Schools. In this case, the report is supplemented by the more comprehensive findings of a team of educational consultants from SchoolWorks that conducted the five-year renewal inspection at the school in January 2004. That report can be viewed by going to the Department of Education website and clicking on *Reports*. <http://www.doe.mass.edu/charter/>

The team evaluated data and written information on the school's performance and improvement efforts, including the school's Compass School application and Renewal Inspection Report (January 2004). Panelists then visited the school to meet with school leaders, staff, parents, and students, and to visit classrooms in order to answer the following two key questions:

1. Is this school using effective improvement initiatives that could be replicated in other similarly profiled schools?
2. Are the conditions in place for this school to serve as a model of effective practices and successful improvement initiatives?

The panel's responses to these two questions frame the report. In the process of answering these questions, the report focuses primarily on the initiatives that the school identified in its application as having had the most positive impact on student performance.

The findings and conclusions presented here are the product of analysis, discussion, and observation, and are based on the evidence made available to the panel before and during its visit. A list of panel members who participated in the school panel review is provided in Appendix A. A detailed schedule of the panel's activities is provided in Appendix B.

School Profile

The Community Day Charter Public School is one of 59 charter schools in Massachusetts. Located in Lawrence, the school has a school-wide Title I program that serves 306 students in grades Pre-K through 8. Enrollment over the past three years has increased from 271 in 2002. Sixty-eight percent of the students receive free and reduced price lunch (FRPL), 83% of the students are Hispanic, 32% are designated as Limited English Proficient (LEP) (quadrupled from 8% in 2002), 4% are Black, and 12% are White. English is not the first language (FLNE) for 80% of the students, a fact that has been relatively consistent at the school over the past few years. Seventeen percent of the students are currently on Individual Education Plans (close to the state average).

The daily attendance rate in 2004 was 95.3, slightly down from 96.6 in 2002, with the average number of days absent at 8.5% in 2004. The in-school suspension rate increased significantly in 2003 to 8.2%, up from 3.8 in 2000. The out-of-school suspension rate also went up, from 2.1 in 2000 to 6.2% in 2003.

Staffing

The school administration includes three principals, one for grades K-1, one for grades 2-4, and one for grades 5-8. There are two assistant principals, one guidance counselor, four special educators, and one librarian. There are 32 teachers at the school.

MCAS Results

The school's Cycle II (2001-02) baseline CPI in English language arts was 84.4; the baseline CPI in mathematics was 73.5. The school made Adequate Yearly Progress in the aggregate for ELA and mathematics, as well as for all reported subgroups.

The school received a Performance Rating of Very High in English language arts (CPI of 90.5) and High in mathematics (CPI of 86.4) for Cycle III (2003-04), much above the Lawrence Public School District scores. There has been Adequate Yearly Progress in the aggregate and for all reported subgroups since 1999. The school also exceeded its NCLB Improvement Targets in both content areas significantly, including a CPI increase of 6.1 in English language (target 2.6). In mathematics the school increased its CPI by 12.9, well above its improvement target of 4.4.

Students in each of the reported subgroups also showed significant CPI increases: students with limited English proficiency (LEP) increased the CPI by 24.0 in ELA and 22.6 in mathematics; students with special needs increased the CPI in ELA by 11.3 and 28.6 in mathematics; free and reduced-price lunch students increased the CPI by 6.9 in ELA and 14.8 in mathematics. Hispanic students increased the CPI 6.1 in ELA and 14.3 for mathematics. The participation rate was 100% in the past two years.

MCAS Overview

Students at the Community Day Charter Public School are assessed in grades 3, 4, and 7 in English language arts (ELA) and in grades 4, 6, and 8 in mathematics. In the school's Cycle III End-of-Cycle AYP Report (2003-2004), the school made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in the aggregate for both ELA and mathematics. The school also made AYP in ELA and mathematics for each of its reported subgroups: Limited English Proficient, Special Education, Free/Reduced Price Lunch, and Hispanic students.¹ Substantial increases in the CPI for each subgroup were achieved in both subject areas, contributing to the overall increases in the Composite Proficiency Index (CPI) of 6.1 in ELA and 12.9 in mathematics.

Student Performance in English Language Arts

In Cycle III, Community Day Charter Public School received a performance rating of Very High for its Composite Proficiency Index (CPI) of 90.5 in ELA. Its 6.1-point improvement over its Cycle II (2001-02) CPI of 84.4 was rated *Above Target*. Participation rates in the ELA test in Cycle III were 100 percent. At the Lawrence Public School level, a Cycle III Performance Rating of Low was achieved in ELA. In Cycle III, the number of special education students tested did not meet the minimum sample size.

¹ In accordance with the federal No Child Left Behind Act passed in 2001, student performance is disaggregated by the following subgroups: Limited English Proficient, Special Education, Free/Reduced Price Lunch, African-American/Black, Asian or Pacific Islander, Hispanic, Native American, and White. A minimum of 40 students (or 5% of the total number of students assessed, whichever is greater) per subgroup is required to issue a statistically sound rating or determination of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP).

GRADE 3 READING

The 73% in third grade scoring Proficient in 2004 represent an increase from 50% in 2001. In Cycle III, the number of special education students tested did not meet the minimum sample size.

GRADE 4

At fourth grade level during Cycle III (2003-04), 43% of all students scored Proficient and 4% scored Advanced. From 2001 to 2004, students scoring Needs Improvement declined from 55% to 52%, with 0% scoring Warning in 2004.

GRADE 7

In 2004, 25% of grade 7 students scored Advanced, 64% scored Proficient, and 11% scored Needs Improvement.

Student Performance in Mathematics

In Cycle III (2003-2004), Community Day Charter Public School received a performance rating of High for its aggregate Performance Index (CPI) of 86.4. For its 12.9-point increase over the Cycle II (2001-2002) baseline CPI of 73.5, the school received an improvement rating of Above Target. Participation rates were 100% in 2003 and 2004.

GRADE 4

In 2001, 24% of grade 4 students performed at the Warning level, 21% scored at the Proficient level, 0% scored at the Advanced level, and 55% were at Needs Improvement. By 2004, 0% scored at the Warning level, 13% scored in the Advanced category, 26% scored Proficient, and 61% scored in the Needs Improvement category.

GRADE 6

In 2001, 21% of the sixth grade students at Community Day scored at the Warning level, 25% in the Needs Improvement category, 18% scored Proficient, and 36% scored Advanced. By 2004, only 2% tested scored at the Warning level, 30% scored in the Needs Improvement category, 43% scored Proficient, and 25% scored in the Advanced category.

GRADE 8

In 2001, 11% of the eighth graders tested in mathematics scored at the Warning level, 22% scored in the Needs Improvement category, 44% scored at the Proficient level, and 22% scored in the Advanced category. By 2004, 0% scored at the Warning level, 34% scored in the Needs Improvement category, 38% scored at the Proficient level, and 28% scored at the Advanced level.

Responses to the Key Questions

Key Question 1: Is this school using effective improvement initiatives that could be replicated in other similarly profiled schools?

Yes. Community Day Charter Public School offers a model for a comprehensive, coherent standards-based instructional program designed to prepare students from pre-school through grade 8 for success in secondary education, post-secondary pursuits, and beyond. The small school boasts an extraordinary combination of prodigious human resources, effective governance, and long-term stability in the student body and in parental support and involvement with the school that would be quite a challenge to duplicate.

However, the school's organic approach to infusing its classrooms with clear learning standards and expectations and sharpening its use of assessments over time to track student progress includes several pieces which could certainly be replicated in many schools.

A. Which improvement initiatives have had the greatest positive impact on student performance results?

In its application, the school highlighted the following strategies as key to the success of their standards-based instructional program:

- ♦ Essential Data for Educators provides teacher-friendly reports on MCAS, and Terra Nova performance data on outgoing and incoming classes targets gaps in specific skills and knowledge which teachers use to refine curriculum calendars and guide instruction.
- ♦ Action Plans provide strategies for teachers that benefit the whole class as well as individual students.
- ♦ Personal Educational Goals (PEG) replace the traditional report card to track student progress toward specific targets.

A driving element of the Community Day Charter School's (CDCPS) philosophy is for teachers to "know the standards, teach the standards, and test the standards," and there is a system in place to help the teachers do this. Each year, CDCPS teachers and administrators take part in a rigorous five-day summer orientation program, where they receive valuable training on the strategies and tools developed in-house for improved student performance. During this week-long training, teachers receive up-to-date lists of Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks Learning Standards in every subject, standards checklists to assess individual student progress, detailed instruction on the data analysis model that connects MCAS results with curriculum development, step-by-step processes involving curriculum mapping, assessment strategies, scoring rubrics, diversity of learning styles and instructional methodologies, supplementary resources including lists of all authors and selections from the MCAS reading selections, and math vocabulary lists with every word from the MCAS test in Mathematics. Teachers also participate in hands-on activities culminating in the development of thematic, interdisciplinary

curriculum units. Throughout this week, teachers have unlimited access to technical support from CDCPS mentor teachers

Essential Data for Educators

The school's Data Analyst uses software developed in-house to create user-friendly reports for teachers and administrators. The reports show, for each subject tested, how much each student, each class, and each grade knew about each MCF Learning Standard. This model has been successful because the guiding principle is giving teachers and administrators only the data they need. Teachers get training to use the reports effectively throughout the school year. This provides teachers with the tools and skills needed to help every student meet set goals and help the school make Adequate Yearly Progress.

This approach to using the standards and performance data to drive instruction not only empowers teachers but also emphasizes performance data as a tool with a specific purpose: refining teaching to improve learning. The details of these reports and the system for disseminating and working with them could be shared with other schools.

According to the school's Compass School Application and documents reviewed on site, the CDCPS's Essential Data for Educators reports include:

- ◆ MCAS results, in the form of easy to use reports that pinpoint individual student performance by classroom and grade level, are given to each teacher for the student s/he taught last year (outgoing students) and for the classes s/he is teaching this year (incoming students).
- ◆ Longitudinal MCAS results are included to show how the same students have performed in successive years.
- ◆ Every MCAS question for the past three years appears. Included are annotations about the specific question's MCF Learning Standard, school and state scores, and percentage of responses on all answer choices so teachers can gain an understanding of student thought processes and devise strategies for teaching this standard.
- ◆ Other data includes standardized test results (*TerraNova*) in Reading, Language, Math, Science, and Social Studies. How individual students perform on each *TerraNova* objective (each objective has been correlated with one or more MCF Learning Standards) helps in teaching to the standards.

Curriculum Map/Calendars

Teachers developed curriculum maps for each grade level and subject area that specify when to teach each unit and the standards to be covered within the unit. These maps are available to all teachers online through the school's intranet. Calendars can be adjusted or refined as needed, based on student performance results.

Personal Educational Goals (PEG)

Each student at CDCPS has a PEG available online in the school's intranet. PEGs go home three times a year, in December, March and June. Replacing the traditional report card, the PEGs include an overall numerical rating for both academic content and conduct in each subject, based on a rubric from zero to four—with zero unacceptable and four being distinguished work. Included is a narrative description of the student's performance. The report also provides goals and an action plan for the student and the teacher. The report also includes performance ratings for Community Standards and Attendance. The Modifications classification is there for some students. For instance, modifications for a student in grade 6 on the December report called for the use of “visuals with verbal directions, tasks broken into components and intermediate products, hands-on curriculum, ... and the use of graphic organizers.”

Action Plans

At the summer orientation week, the staff is led through the Essential Data for Educators reports generated on MCAS and *TerraNova* performance. Guiding questions direct teachers to identify areas and standards for focus with the students they will be teaching in the coming year. This includes identifying specific trends for effective grouping of students during the year.

Teachers also generate an individual Action Plan for individual students they taught during the previous school year in any or all of seven focus areas:

- ✓ Writing process
- ✓ Vocabulary/word walls
- ✓ Technology, including programs such as Accelerated Reader, where applicable
- ✓ Note taking/outlining/graphic organizers
- ✓ Differentiated instruction/grouping/team teaching/specialized instruction for learning needs
- ✓ Incorporation of grammar and writing conventions
- ✓ Strategies for open response questions

Does the available data support the school's reported impact in the area intended?

Yes. Community Day Charter received Performance Ratings of Very High in ELA and High in Mathematics. The school has made significant improvement in both ELA and mathematics during Cycle III and has exceeded improvement targets in both content areas. In mathematics, the CPI increase was 12.9 (target 4.4) and in ELA the increase was 6.1 (target 2.6). There is a strong correlation between the school's approaches to standards-based, individualized instruction and the impressive improvements the school has made over the past two years for each of its reported subgroups, including Hispanic, low income, Limited English Proficient (LEP), and special education students. Hispanic students, for example, show a CPI of 84.9 in mathematics, reflecting a CPT increase of 14.3, and a CPI 90.5 in ELA, increasing their CPI by 6.1.

Data provided in the school's annual report comparing the percentage of Hispanic students scoring in Proficient and Advanced categories shows the school far surpassing state averages and all other schools serving the same grade levels in Lawrence. At grade 7, 89% of all students tested scored in Proficient or Advanced categories compared to the state average of 36%. The school also provided data favorably comparing its level of proficiency to that of all other urban charters schools serving the same grade levels.

B. How did the school plan its improvement initiatives and put them into practice?

The Community Day Charter Public School is a public elementary charter school opened in 1995. The story of improvement at the school appears by all accounts to be one of evolution over the past ten years as they have worked to implement a standards-based educational environment designed to serve their students learning needs. During the past four years, the school has continuously refined and formalized its use of data to drive curriculum and instruction.

In response to the question "What has changed in the past three years to achieve the improvements you have made?" teachers consistently said that they have gotten better at standards-based education and that they now have regular mechanisms in place to ensure that things get done consistently. As one administrator put it, we now have systems in place so we are not reinventing the wheel every September.

C. Does the school think these initiatives can be successfully used in similar schools?

Yes. The administrators and staff at the school think that other schools could implement the tools and systems they have developed to use data to drive instruction. They also think that many of the other practices they have now institutionalized, for example co-teaching, could be adapted in other schools.

Key Question 2: Are the conditions in place for this school to serve as a model of effective practices and successful improvement initiatives?

Yes. The leaders and staff at the school have developed a set of useful tools, training, and supports for teachers that constitute a strong instructional program. Administrators and core staff are prepared to share specific pieces of that program with educators from other schools.

A. Do leadership and staff have a shared understanding and use a common language to describe the changes/initiatives that have led to improvements in teaching and learning?

Yes. Teachers in focus groups and in individual conversations report that the two key tools they use to guide their instruction and communicate about student progress/areas of need are the Action Plans and Personal Education Goals (PEGs). Teachers describe a standards-based environment, driven by clear expectations for everyone and a high degree of teacher accountability.

B. How effectively do leadership and staff articulate the connections between the specific changes and improvement initiatives they have implemented, and the gains made in student achievement?

During the visit, the Panel spoke with all of the administrators and groups of teachers from the elementary and the middle school, and dropped in on several classes to talk with the teachers. Staff at the school consistently articulated a link between clear expectations and the coordination of efforts to meet the individual needs of each student. They also cited the importance of assessment data in this effort. Learning specialists assigned to the elementary and middle school, a speech therapist and a Director of Special Education work together to provide pull-out services and regular consultations with individual teachers on remedial strategies and accommodations to instruction. The team's approach in weekly "problem-solving" meetings is, as one staffer put it, "What is the key to this kid?"

C. Is there a school-wide focus on, and sufficient staff investment in, continued improvement of student performance?

Binders filled with standards-based units and lessons in every subject area and developed by CDCPS staff to supplement the curriculum and ensure that all of the learning standards are addressed in a given grade are currently stored in the Data Analyst's office. Staff are in the process of organizing and setting up a small library for centralization and easy access. Currently, teachers receive binders with the appropriate units on the first day of school. The newly-appointed Curriculum Director (who has been teaching 8th grade math at the school for 7 years) plans to index the units so that they become a useful resource for all teachers.

D. Does the school appear to have the capacity to host site visits and to participate in various activities to share effective strategies and practices with other schools in the state? Does the school leader and involved staff communicate effectively both orally and in writing how and why it carried out its strategies for improvement?

Those interviewed spoke eloquently about the school, and in articulating some of the specific elements of their program, including those listed above. There could be some logistical considerations concerning the physical space available at the school, which is actually located in three separate buildings. The preschool and grade 1 are located in a building downtown, grades two to five are housed in a small elementary school building a short drive away, and grades six, seven, and eight are located in a large house up a long driveway from the elementary school.

The school received a dissemination grant from the Massachusetts Department of Education, and in August 2001, CDCPS staff gave an intensive workshop series titled *Master Concepts and Succeed (MCAS)*. Twenty-four teachers from seven public schools learned from the series of topics ranging from curriculum/standards and assessments/rubrics to data collection and analysis for improving student achievement.

E. Does the panel recommend that this school be designated to serve as a Commonwealth Compass School?

Yes. The school offers a strong model for the design of an instructional program with a high level of student focus and teacher accountability. The administrators and other key staff are well-prepared to share the concrete materials and tools that they use during their summer orientation and throughout the year to drive the continuous refinement of their instructional program to meet the needs of their students.

Appendix A

Team Members

Denise Delorey, Ph.D., School Performance Evaluation, MA Department of Education
Tony Siddall, Charter School Office, MA Department of Education

Appendix B

Candidate Compass School Visit Schedule

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| <i>7:30 a.m.</i> | Panelists arrive at school prepare for the day. |
| <i>8:00 a.m.</i> | Parent focus group 1. |
| <i>8:30 a.m.</i> | Meeting with 3 Heads of School. |
| <i>9:00 a.m.</i> | Panelist 1: Interview Director of Technology and Data Analyst. Panelist 2: Interview SPED Director and special needs staff. |
| <i>9:30-11 a.m.</i> | Panelists 1 & 2 make classroom visits, talk with teachers and students, and look at curriculum materials, student work, and PEGs. |
| <i>11-12 noon</i> | Working lunch. |
| <i>12:00-12:30 p.m.</i> | Panelist 1 conducts focus group of five elementary teachers. Panelist 2 conducts focus group of six middle school teachers. |
| <i>12:30 – 1 p.m.</i> | Panelists hold exit meeting with Heads of School to answer remaining questions and discuss next steps. |