

Renewal Inspection Report

FOUR RIVERS CHARTER
PUBLIC SCHOOL
GREENFIELD, MA



October 9 -12, 2007

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ABOUT THE RENEWAL PROCESS AND SITE VISIT REPORT

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

Once this application has met a minimal review of its clarity and coherence, the Department of Education will appoint an evaluation team to conduct a three-to-four-day visit of the school to corroborate and augment the school's application for renewal. This report is the result of one such evaluation.

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

HOW TO READ THIS REPORT

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

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

RENEWAL INSPECTION TEAM

Tom Harvey, Ed. D., Team Leader, is a consultant for SchoolWorks and an adjunct faculty member at Endicott College. His career in Maine included positions in teaching, coaching, school counseling and school administration at levels spanning kindergarten through post-graduate.

Paul Morano, Team Member, is a SchoolWorks consultant who has an extensive background in the field of education. He has taught and been a department head at middle school and high school levels in the area of foreign languages. He worked on the Massachusetts Frameworks Committee, the College Board as a presenter, and at Worcester State College as an advanced placement consultant.

Joseph Nigro, Team Member, is an examiner for the Massachusetts Office of Educational Quality and Accountability and a program supervisor for The Education Cooperative in its teacher licensure program. He has had a long career in public education as a science teacher and department chair.

Karl Smith Ed.D., Team Member, is a SchoolWorks Project Associate and works as an adjunct faculty member with Lesley University in curriculum, assessment and teaching. He has an extensive background in middle school, serving as a principal, department team leader and as a team member conducting school site visits through the Rhode Island SALT Program.

SETTING

The Four Rivers Charter Public School (FRCPS) opened in 2003 in Greenfield, Massachusetts and is now entering its fifth year of operation. By adding one grade per year, the school has grown from its founding grades 7 and 8 enrollment of 64 students and now serves 192 students in grades 7 through 12. Enrollment is determined by a lottery with preference given to siblings of current students. The school received 122 applications for 45 open seats. This resulted in 77 students being placed on a waiting list. The student population has remained stable as most students stay enrolled.

The school draws 38 percent of its students from Greenfield. The rest of the student population is from communities across Franklin County. According to the 2007 annual report, the student demographics are: 1% Hispanic, 1% Asian, 2% Black/Mixed Race, 1% Native American and 95% White. The special education population is at 18.6% and the free and reduced lunch population is at 23.6%.

FRCPS has 16 full-time core academic teachers, including 3 special education teachers. Of the school's 16 core academic teachers, 62.5 percent are licensed in their current teaching assignment and 100 percent have been identified as highly qualified. In addition to full-time core faculty, Four Rivers has four full-time assistant teachers, each of whom is Highly Qualified as paraprofessionals. More than half of the school's teachers have been at the school for two years or more.

The school is governed by a nine-member Board of Trustees, with the executive director serving in an ex-officio capacity (i.e., non-voting member). In the spring of 2007, in response to the increased administrative demands caused by the school's continual growth in enrollment over the last five years, the Board, after careful study, decided to add a school principal to their administrative staff and adjusted the make-up of the school's leadership structure. Beginning in the fall of 2007, the title of Director was changed to Executive Director and a new administrative team was formed, composed of the Executive Director, the Director of Operations, the newly-hired Principal and the school secretary. The pre-existing leadership team continued to function as the leadership body that directs the day-to-day educational aspects of the school (e.g., curriculum, instruction and assessment) and is led by the new Principal.

The overall academic program at FRCPS is tied to Expeditionary Learning and uses its five core practices and related benchmarks as overarching supports for student learning. In addition, students are provided with instruction in the areas of music, art, technology, physical education and wellness, and nature/adventure. The school's mission supports the ideas of learning and service, rigorous instruction and character development, which are tied to three central themes: nature, technology and community. The school's curricula are aligned with the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks.

Four Rivers Charter Public School has fiscal stability and has net assets of \$5.4 million. They have been able to maintain a surplus each year of operation while adding staff and constructing classroom buildings. The school is located on eight acres of land that was formerly used as a farm. The land is owned by the schools' affiliated non-profit organization, the Four Rivers

Educational Foundation, which leases the land to the school. Over the past four charter years, FRCPS has built a middle school building and a high school building on site.

FINDINGS

In preparing this report, the Renewal Inspection Team spent three-and-a-half days at Four Rivers Charter Public School (FRCPS) from October 9 - 12, 2007. During that time, the team observed more than 25 lessons. The team conducted focus group interviews with six members of the Board of Trustees, 12 parents representing various grades, 10 teachers, four administrators and 15 students in grades 7 and 8 (8 students) and 9 through 12 (7 students). The team also conducted individual interviews with the Executive Director, Principal and Director of Operations. In addition, the team interviewed the Assistant Principal, Expeditionary Learning Consultant, Guidance Counselor, College Counselor, Special Education Staff and members of the Faculty Leadership Team.

The team also examined a wide range of documents. These documents included financial statements, test results (e.g., MCAS and TerraNova), the school's annual reports, accountability plan, the Charter Renewal Application, reports from previous site visits, the Board of Trustees by-laws and minutes from meetings, demographics data, curriculum binders, samples of student work, completed evaluation forms for school staff and administrators and the professional development schedule for the year. In addition, the team examined samples of teacher lesson plans and examined teachers' areas of certification and years of experience, as well as the school's plans for the future, including a new accountability plan that will extend to school years 2008 – 2012.

RENEWAL QUESTION 1: IS THE ACADEMIC PROGRAM A SUCCESS?

- 1. Students at Four Rivers Charter Public School have outperformed their peers in the Greenfield Public Schools and across the state on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) across the charter term in almost all areas.**

Grade 7 ELA Results

Grade 7 students at FRCPS consistently outperformed their peers in the Greenfield Public Schools and in the state on the ELA MCAS across school years. In 2004, 72 percent of FRCPS grade 7 students scored at the Proficient and Advanced levels, compared to 68 percent of grade 7 students who scored at the Advanced and Proficient levels in the Greenfield Public Schools and in the state.

In 2005, 88 percent of grade 7 FRCPS students scored at the Proficient and Advanced levels, compared to 67 percent and 66 percent of grade 7 students in the Greenfield Public Schools and in the state, respectively.

In 2006, seventh grade student performance declined slightly, with 74 percent of students performing at the Advanced and Proficient levels. Despite the decline, FRCPS students continued to outperform their peers in the Greenfield Public Schools and across the state, with 58 percent and 66 percent of seventh grade students, respectively, performing at the Advanced and Proficient levels.

In 2007, student performance rose slightly; 78 percent of seventh grade students at FRCPS performed at the Proficient level. (No students achieved Advanced.) Students at FRCPS continued to outperform their peers in the Greenfield Public Schools and across the state, with 65 percent of GPS students achieving proficiency and 69 percent of seventh grade students achieving proficiency statewide.

**Table 1: Four Rivers Charter Public School MCAS 2004-07
Percentage of Students in each MCAS Performance Category
Grade 7 – English Language Arts**

| | | N | %A | %P | %NI | %W |
|------|-------------|----|----|----|-----|----|
| 2004 | Four Rivers | 32 | 3 | 69 | 25 | 3 |
| | Greenfield | | 7 | 61 | 22 | 10 |
| | State | | 9 | 59 | 25 | 7 |
| 2005 | Four Rivers | 33 | 9 | 79 | 12 | 0 |
| | Greenfield | | 4 | 63 | 25 | 7 |
| | State | | 10 | 56 | 27 | 7 |
| 2006 | Four Rivers | 35 | 3 | 71 | 23 | 3 |
| | Greenfield | | 7 | 51 | 26 | 9 |
| | State | | 10 | 55 | 26 | 9 |
| 2007 | Four Rivers | 36 | 0 | 78 | 19 | 3 |
| | Greenfield | | 4 | 61 | 22 | 13 |
| | State | | 9 | 60 | 23 | 8 |

N = number of students tested; A = Advanced; P = Proficient; NI = Needs Improvement; W = Warning

Grade 8 ELA Results

FRCPS has maintained a high percentage of 8th grade students performing at the Advanced and Proficient levels over the past two charter years. The first class of 8th grade students took the MCAS in 2006. Eighty-eight percent of these students performed in the Advanced or Proficient categories on the ELA assessment. In 2007, student performance rates declined 5 percentage points from 2006, to 83 percent achieving in the Advanced or Proficient categories. There was an increase in the percent of students scoring in the category of Needs Improvement.

In both 2006 and 2007, the percentage of students scoring in the Advanced / Proficient categories in grade 8 on the ELA assessment, exceeded the performance rates of students in the neighboring Greenfield Public Schools as well as their peers across state.

**Table 2: Four Rivers Charter Public School MCAS 2006-07
Percentage of Student in each MCAS Performance Category
Grade 8 – English Language Arts (ELA)**

| | | N | %A | %P | %NI | %W |
|------|-------------|----|----|----|-----|----|
| 2006 | Four Rivers | 33 | 15 | 73 | 9 | 3 |
| | Greenfield | | 6 | 65 | 18 | 11 |
| | State | | 12 | 62 | 19 | 7 |
| 2007 | Four Rivers | 31 | 6 | 77 | 16 | 0 |
| | Greenfield | | 3 | 61 | 29 | 7 |
| | State | | 12 | 63 | 18 | 6 |

N = number of students tested; A = Advanced; P = Proficient; NI = Needs Improvement; W = Warning

Grade 8 Mathematics Results

Grade 8 students at FRCPS have shown fluctuations in the percentage performing at the Advanced and Proficient levels on the mathematics assessment during this charter term. In 2004, 37% of grade 8 students achieved Proficiency or higher. In 2005, 26% of FRCPS students scored Proficient, a decrease from the previous year. In 2006, 34 percent of grade 8 students performed at the Advanced or Proficient levels, whereas, in 2007, 48 percent of students scored Advanced or Proficient on the mathematics MCAS.

In 2004 and 2007, FRCPS students exceeded the performance of grade 8 students in the Greenfield Public Schools, with a greater percentage of students in the Advanced and Proficient categories on the mathematics test. This was not the case in 2005 or 2006.

FRCPS grade 8 students did not exceed the performance rates of students scoring Advanced or Proficient across the state in mathematics in 2004, 2005 or 2006. In 2007, however, FRCPS grade 8 students exceeded the performance rates of Commonwealth students, with 48 percent of FRCPS grade 8 students scoring at the Advanced/Proficient levels, whereas only 45 percent of grade 8 students performed at these two levels statewide.

**Table 3: Four Rivers Charter Public School MCAS 2004-07
Percentage of Student in each MCAS Performance Category
Grade 8 – Mathematics**

| | | N | %A | %P | %NI | %W |
|------|-------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------|-----------|
| 2004 | Four Rivers | 32 | 9 | 28 | 56 | 6 |
| | Greenfield | | 4 | 29 | 30 | 37 |
| | State | | 13 | 26 | 32 | 29 |
| 2005 | Four Rivers | 34 | 0 | 26 | 59 | 15 |
| | Greenfield | | 8 | 20 | 39 | 33 |
| | State | | 13 | 26 | 30 | 31 |
| 2006 | Four Rivers | 32 | 6 | 28 | 47 | 19 |
| | Greenfield | | 9 | 30 | 29 | 32 |
| | State | | 12 | 28 | 31 | 29 |
| 2007 | Four Rivers | 31 | 13 | 35 | 26 | 26 |
| | Greenfield | | 12 | 19 | 36 | 33 |
| | State | | 17 | 28 | 30 | 25 |

N = number of students tested; A = Advanced; P = Proficient; NI = Needs Improvement; W = Warning

Grade 8 Science and Technology Results

On the grade 8 science and technology test, FRCPS student performance shows a declining trend in the rate of students scoring in the Advanced/Proficient categories from 2004 to 2007. In both 2004 and 2005, 47 percent of grade 8 students scored at the Advanced and Proficient levels on the science and technology MCAS. In the following school years, FRCPS student performance rates decreased incrementally to 41 percent in 2006 and 38 percent in 2007. Across school years, however, grade 8 student performance rates on the science and technology test exceeded the performance rates of students in the Greenfield Public Schools and the state from 2004 through 2007 – that is, across the years of the charter term.

**Table 4: Four Rivers Charter Public School MCAS 2004-07
Percentage of Student in each MCAS Performance Category
Grade 8 – Science and Technology**

| | | N | %A | %P | %NI | %W |
|------|-------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------|-----------|
| 2004 | Four Rivers | 32 | 9 | 38 | 34 | 19 |
| | Greenfield | | 1 | 22 | 41 | 36 |
| | State | | 5 | 28 | 35 | 31 |
| 2005 | Four Rivers | 34 | 3 | 44 | 47 | 6 |
| | Greenfield | | 3 | 18 | 46 | 33 |
| | State | | 4 | 29 | 41 | 26 |
| 2006 | Four Rivers | 32 | 3 | 38 | 41 | 19 |
| | Greenfield | | 2 | 25 | 49 | 24 |
| | State | | 4 | 28 | 43 | 25 |
| 2007 | Four Rivers | 31 | 6 | 32 | 45 | 16 |
| | Greenfield | | 2 | 17 | 47 | 34 |
| | State | | 3 | 30 | 44 | 24 |

N = number of students tested; A = Advanced; P = Proficient; NI = Needs Improvement; W = Warning

Grade 10 ELA Results

Tenth grade students have been enrolled at FRCPS since the 2005-06 school year. A review of ELA MCAS data indicates that grade 10 students at FRCPS have maintained a high percentage of students performing at the Advanced and Proficient levels. In 2006, 86 percent of grade 10 students scored in the Advanced and Proficient categories on the ELA assessment. In 2007, 83 percent of grade 10 students scored in the Advanced/Proficient categories on the ELA MCAS.

FRCPS grade 10 student performance rates exceeded the performance rates of students in the Greenfield Public Schools and in the state. In both years, FRCPS students had a greater percentage of grade 10 students in the Advanced and Proficient categories on the ELA assessment, and lower percentages of students in Needs Improvement and Warning categories.

**Table 5: Four Rivers Charter Public School MCAS 2006-07
Percentage of Student in each MCAS Performance Category
Grade 10 – English Language Arts**

| | | N | %A | %P | %NI | %W |
|------|-------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------|-----------|
| 2006 | Four Rivers | 34 | 12 | 74 | 15 | 0 |
| | Greenfield | | 8 | 61 | 28 | 3 |
| | State | | 16 | 53 | 24 | 7 |
| 2007 | Four Rivers | 30 | 20 | 63 | 17 | 0 |
| | Greenfield | | 14 | 43 | 34 | 10 |
| | State | | 22 | 49 | 24 | 6 |

N = number of students tested; A = Advanced; P = Proficient; NI = Needs Improvement; W = Warning

Grade 10 Mathematics Results

On the 2006 mathematics MCAS, 86 percent of grade 10 FRCPS students scored at the Advanced or Proficient levels. In 2007, 83 percent of students scored at the Advanced/Proficient levels. While there was a slight decrease in the percentage of students scoring in these categories combined, the percentage of students scoring in the Advanced category increased significantly.

In 2006, FRCPS grade 10 students exceeded the performance rates of students in the Greenfield Public Schools (67%) and the state (69%), scoring Advanced/Proficient on the mathematics test by 19 percentage points and 17 percentage points, respectively. In 2007, 83 percent of FRCPS students scored at the Advanced/Proficient levels on the grade 10 mathematics test, which also exceeded the performance rates of their peers in the Greenfield Public Schools (62%) and the state rates (69%) at the Advanced and Proficient levels, combined.

**Table 6: Four Rivers Charter Public School MCAS 2006-07
Percentage of Student in each MCAS Performance Category
Grade 10 – Mathematics**

| | | N | %A | %P | %NI | %W |
|------|-------------|----|----|----|-----|----|
| 2006 | Four Rivers | 34 | 12 | 74 | 15 | 0 |
| | Greenfield | | 37 | 30 | 25 | 9 |
| | State | | 16 | 53 | 24 | 7 |
| 2007 | Four Rivers | 30 | 60 | 23 | 13 | 3 |
| | Greenfield | | 29 | 33 | 26 | 12 |
| | State | | 42 | 27 | 22 | 9 |

2. Four Rivers Charter Public School made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) across the charter term in both English language arts and mathematics.

English Language Arts

Four Rivers Charter Public School made AYP for ELA in Cycle III, Cycle IV and at the mid-cycle in 2007 by exceeding the state performance targets in the aggregate and for the White student subgroup. This is the only subgroup that meets the statistical significance criterion for disaggregation.

In Cycle III, FRCPS students exceed the state target of 75.6, achieving a composite score of 87.5 and a performance rating of high.

**Table 7: Adequate Yearly Progress Report
Four Rivers Charter Public School
2004 AYP ELA Cycle III Report**

| English Language Arts | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|-----------------------|---------------|----------|-----|------------|------------------------------|------|------------|-------------|------------|------------|------------|----------|
| Student Group | 2004 | | | | Cycle III (2003 & 2004) Data | | | | | 2004 | | AYP 2004 |
| | Participation | | | | Performance | | | Improvement | | Attendance | | |
| | Enrolled | Assessed | % | Met Target | N | CPI | Met Target | CPI Change | Met Target | % | Met Target | |
| Aggregate | 32 | 32 | 100 | Yes | 32 | 87.5 | Yes | - | - | 93.9 | Yes | Yes |
| White | 31 | 31 | - | - | 31 | 87.1 | - | - | - | 93.9 | - | - |

In Cycle IV, FRCPS students exceed the state target of 80.5, achieving a composite score of 87.5 and a performance rating of very high.

**Table 8: Adequate Yearly Progress Report
Four Rivers Charter Public School
2006 AYP ELA Cycle IV Report**

| English Language Arts | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|-----------------------|---------------|----------|-----|------------|-----------------------------|------|------------|-------------|------------|------------|------------|----------|
| Student Group | 2006 | | | | Cycle IV (2005 & 2006) Data | | | | | 2006 | | AYP 2006 |
| | Participation | | | | Performance | | | Improvement | | Attendance | | |
| | Enrolled | Assessed | % | Met Target | N | CPI | Met Target | CPI Change | Met Target | % | Met Target | |
| Aggregate | 102 | 102 | 100 | Yes | 102 | 93.9 | Yes | 6.4 | Yes | 94.0 | Yes | Yes |
| White | 96 | 96 | - | - | 96 | 94.5 | - | - | - | 94.0 | - | - |

In 2007 (mid-Cycle V), FRCPS students also made AYP in ELA by achieving a composite score of 93.6 in the aggregate, which exceeds the state target of 85.4. FRCPS continued to maintain a performance rating of very high in 2007.

Mathematics

Four Rivers Charter Public School made AYP for mathematics in Cycle III, Cycle IV and at the mid-cycle in 2007 by exceeding the state performance targets in the aggregate and for the White student subgroup. This is the only subgroup that meets the statistical significance criterion for disaggregation.

In Cycle III, FRCPS students exceed the state target of 60.8, achieving a composite score of 70.3 and a performance rating of high.

**Table 9: Adequate Yearly Progress Report
Four Rivers Charter Public School
2004 AYP Mathematics Cycle III Report**

| Mathematics | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|------------------|---------------|----------|-----|------------|------------------------------|------|------------|-------------|------------|------------|------------|----------|
| Student Group | 2004 | | | | Cycle III (2003 & 2004) Data | | | | | 2004 | | AYP 2004 |
| | Participation | | | | Performance | | | Improvement | | Attendance | | |
| | Enrolled | Assessed | % | Met Target | N | CPI | Met Target | CPI Change | Met Target | % | Met Target | |
| Aggregate | 32 | 32 | 100 | Yes | 32 | 70.3 | Yes | - | - | 93.9 | Yes | Yes |
| White | 31 | 31 | - | - | 31 | 71.0 | - | - | - | 93.9 | - | - |

In Cycle IV, FRCPS students exceed the state target of 68.7, achieving a composite score of 73.8 and a performance rating of above target.

**Table 10: Adequate Yearly Progress Report
Four Rivers Charter Public School
2006 AYP Mathematics Cycle III Report**

| Mathematics | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|------------------|---------------|----------|-----|------------|------------------------------|------|------------|-------------|------------|------------|------------|----------|
| Student Group | 2006 | | | | Cycle III (2005 & 2006) Data | | | | | 2006 | | AYP 2006 |
| | Participation | | | | Performance | | | Improvement | | Attendance | | |
| | Enrolled | Assessed | % | Met Target | N | CPI | Met Target | CPI Change | Met Target | % | Met Target | |
| Aggregate | 101 | 101 | 100 | Yes | 100 | 73.8 | Yes | 3.5 | Yes | 94.0 | Yes | Yes |
| White | 95 | 95 | - | - | 97 | 73.2 | - | - | - | 94.0 | - | - |

In 2007 (mid-Cycle V), FRCPS students also made AYP in mathematics by achieving a composite score of 81.6 in the aggregate, which exceeds the state target of 76.5. FRCPS continued to maintain a performance rating of high in 2007.

3. TerraNova results on the reading, language and mathematics tests show fluctuations in growth across subjects and student cohorts.

The TerraNova is a standardized, norm-referenced achievement test that is used to measure student performance growth in various areas subject areas. Use of Normal Curve Equivalent (NCE) scores offers the most accurate comparisons of student performance growth over time. The TerraNova may be used to help teachers and school leaders determine individual student performance strengths and weaknesses across subject areas. It is also used to measure student growth over time (i.e., from year-to-year).

The TerraNova is administered to students in grades 7 through 9, in reading, language and mathematics at FRCPS. In the Fall of initial entry at the school, the TerraNova is administered as a baseline. In each subsequent year (in the grade levels tested), the TerraNova is administered in the Spring. Because the TerraNova is used to measure growth over time, results are reported by student classes. Cohorts are approximate and the number of students (n) enrolled at administration of the test is identified in each table.

Class of 2008

From baseline to the final administration, students in the class of 2008 showed gains on the TerraNova on all three subject tests: reading, language and mathematics.

**Table 11: Four Rivers Charter Public School
TerraNova Basic Multiple Assessments (in NCEs)**

| Class of 2008 | Fall 2003 (n) | Spring 2004 (n) | Spring 2005 (n) | Total Change (from baseline) |
|--------------------|------------------|--------------------|--------------------|---------------------------------|
| Reading | 66.8 (32) | 64.3 (32) | 67.0 (34) | +0.2 |
| Language | 61.4 (32) | 67.4 (32) | 65.9 (34) | +4.5 |
| Mathematics | 61.4 (32) | 60.6 (32) | 65.0 (34) | +3.6 |

Class of 2009

Students in the class of 2009 showed an improvement of 0.6 NCEs on the reading test from baseline to the final administration of the TerraNova. However, the change in NCEs in both language and mathematics decreased 1.0 and 0.7 NCEs, respectively from the Fall of 2003 to the Spring of 2006.

**Table 12: Four Rivers Charter Public School
TerraNova Basic Multiple Assessments (in NCEs)**

| Class of 2009 | Fall 2003 (n) | Spring 2004 (n) | Spring 2005 (n) | Spring 2006 (n) | Total Change (from baseline) |
|--------------------|------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|---------------------------------|
| Reading | 66.0 (32) | 65.7 (32) | 65.9 (33) | 66.6 (32) | +0.6 |
| Language | 65.2 (32) | 63.9 (32) | 62.2 (33) | 64.2 (32) | -1.0 |
| Mathematics | 62.4 (32) | 62.1 (32) | 63.6(33) | 61.7 (32) | -0.7 |

Class of 2010

Students in the class of 2010 showed improvement on both the reading test (NCE gain of 7.5) and the mathematics test (NCE gain of 4.6) from baseline to the final administration of the TerraNova. However, the change in NCEs on the language test decreased 2.6 NCEs, from the Fall of 2004 to the spring of 2007.

**Table 13: Four Rivers Charter Public School
TerraNova Basic Multiple Assessments (in NCEs)**

| Class of 2010 | Fall 2004 (n) | Spring 2005 (n) | Spring 2006 (n) | Spring 2007 (n) | Total Change (from baseline) |
|--------------------|------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|---------------------------------|
| Reading | 60.2 (33) | 70.1 (33) | 62.9 (29) | 67.7 (30) | +7.5 |
| Language | 64.9 (33) | 65.7 (33) | 56.2 (29) | 62.3 (30) | -2.6 |
| Mathematics | 61.8 (33) | 67.8 (33) | 66.0 (28) | 66.4 (30) | +4.6 |

Class of 2011

From baseline (Fall of 2005) to the most recent administration of the TerraNova (Spring 2007), students in the class of 2011 did not show any growth on any of the subject tests. In reading, student performance is stable. On the language and the mathematics tests, student performance decreased 5.0 and 4.3 NCEs, respectively, from baseline to the most recent administration.

**Table 14: Four Rivers Charter Public School
TerraNova Basic Multiple Assessments (in NCEs)**

| Class of 2011 | Fall 2005 (n) | Spring 2006 (n) | Spring 2007 (n) | Total Change (from baseline) |
|--------------------|------------------|--------------------|--------------------|---------------------------------|
| Reading | 68.9 (36) | 78.3 (36) | 68.9 (31) | 0.0 |
| Language | 69.6 (36) | 62.2 (36) | 64.6 (31) | -5.0 |
| Mathematics | 67.8 (36) | 69.8 (36) | 63.5 (31) | -4.3 |

Class of 2012

There is one year of data for the class of 2012. From baseline (Fall 2006) to the Spring of 2007, students showed a small increase on the language test (0.2 NCEs). On the reading and mathematics tests, however, student performance decreased 4.0 and 3.0 NCEs, respectively, from baseline to Spring 2007.

**Table 15: Four Rivers Charter Public School
TerraNova Basic Multiple Assessments (in NCEs)**

| Class of 2012 | Fall 2006 (n) | Spring 2007 (n) | Total Change (from baseline) |
|--------------------|------------------|--------------------|---------------------------------|
| Reading | 72.4 (37) | 68.4 (37) | -4.0 |
| Language | 66.3 (37) | 66.5 (37) | +0.2 |
| Mathematics | 70.8 (37) | 67.8 (37) | -3.0 |

In summary, student performance on the TerraNova showed fluctuations across subject tests (reading, language and mathematics) and across student cohorts (classes). While these fluctuations are evidenced in the total change – that is, from baseline to the final administration – fluctuations also occurred from year to year.

In interviews, the school's leadership team reported that they have not yet determined the root causes for fluctuation – and in some cases, declines – in student performance on the TerraNova over time. And further, the leadership team indicated a belief that the MCAS may provide richer data about student achievement of the state's required learning standards.

4. The FRCPS curriculum is aligned to the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks (MCF), the Expeditionary Learning model and the school's mission. FRCPS has made progress in developing curriculum documents and aligning internal assessments to the curriculum.

According to its mission, Four Rivers Charter Public School is dedicated to educating young people for lives of learning and service. The school offers a rigorous academic program aligned with the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks and an emphasis on character development for moral and social responsibility. Three central themes – nature, ecology and community – pervade teaching and learning at the school, engaging students and teachers in a fundamental question of our times: How do we find healthy, fruitful interrelationships of the natural world, technology in its many forms, and the human community? The school works closely with parents and seeks both to serve and to learn from the many resources of Franklin County.

Within the last two years, the school has made significant progress in efforts to align the curriculum with the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks in the core disciplines of English language arts, mathematics, science, Spanish and technology. In addition, they have tied the frameworks to the Expeditionary Learning (EL) model and EL's core benchmarks. Finally, there have been significant efforts to ensure that developed curricula are tied closely to the school's mission.

In the core academic areas of English language arts, mathematics, science, social studies and Spanish, teachers at FRCPS are in the process of developing specific course overviews. The course overviews document the content that will be covered over the course of a trimester. Interviews with teachers and administrators and a review of curriculum documents indicated that course overviews have been completed for the first trimester. Curriculum documents in similar format were also done for each trimester of the previous school year, 2006-07. Teachers continue to work to complete subsequent course overviews for trimesters two and three. Across grades levels and subject areas, the course overviews provide the following components: a course description; course standards; and, specific units of instruction. Course guides are guided by disciplinary goals and performance levels. Each course guide included a course description/overview, related literature, samples of major projects in that core area and an overview of "what I will learn" – to provide students with a clear picture of what they will know and be able to do at the end of the course. For example, the mathematics course guide indicated that students will learn operations, variables and patterns and scientific notation over the duration of that course. Each of the course guides and the content within are aligned with the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks.

English language arts instruction in grade 7 and grade 8 is coordinated with instruction in history and social studies in a double period block each day. In grades 9, 10 and 11, English course

instruction emphasizes student writing and expanding upon students' analytical skills. A review of curriculum documents further indicates that the school's social studies courses are research-based and follow a sequence recommended in the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. In grades 7 through 12, the school's science and technology curriculum are inquiry- and activity-based. Examples observed by the team include hands-on science investigations, student participation in lab activities and research projects conducted by students. A review of curriculum documents revealed that the school has begun the process of creating the same kind of alignment for the school's "Tribes" classes – art, music, nature and technology. The school has already completed trimester one course descriptions and course standards for each Trib.

One of the school's initiatives was to design a curriculum that is aligned to the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks that also incorporates principles of Expeditionary Learning – using EL's core benchmarks - thus paving the way for a system of internal assessments that would, by design, be aligned to the school's curriculum, state frameworks and principles of Expeditionary Learning. According to the EL website, Expeditionary Learning is a comprehensive K-12 educational design. The EL approach combines rigorous academic content and real world projects – learning expeditions – with active teaching and community service. The EL design focuses on teaching in an engaging way. Faculty members receive intensive professional development in curriculum, teaching practices and building a strong school culture.

EL's core practice benchmarks describe Expeditionary Learning in practice: what teachers, students, school leaders, families and other partners do in fully implemented Expeditionary Learning schools. The five core practices – learning expeditions, active pedagogy, school culture and character, leadership and school improvement, and structures – work in concert and support one another to promote high achievement through active learning, character growth and teamwork.

The EL core practice benchmarks serve several purposes. They provide a comprehensive overview of the Expeditionary Learning practices, a planning guide for school leaders and teachers, a framework for designing professional development and a tool for evaluating implementation. Each of the five core practices is comprised of a series of benchmarks. The following table details the five core practices and related benchmarks.

| Expeditionary Learning: Five Core Practices and Related Benchmarks | | | | |
|---|---|--|--|---|
| I. Learning Expeditions | II. Active Pedagogy | III. Culture & Character | IV. Leadership & School Improvement | V. Structures |
| Implementing learning expeditions across the curriculum | Using effective instructional practices school-wide | Building school culture and fostering character | Providing leadership in curriculum, instruction and school culture | Designing time for student and adult learning |
| Designing compelling topics and guiding questions | Teaching reading K-12 across the disciplines | Ensuring equity and high expectations | Sharing leadership and building partnerships | Creating structures for knowing students well |
| Designing products and linked projects | Teaching writing K-12 across the disciplines | Fostering a safe, respectful and orderly community | Using multiple sources of data to improve student achievement | |
| Incorporating fieldwork, local expertise and service learning | Teaching inquiry based math | Promoting adventure and fitness | Creating structures for knowing students well | |
| Producing and presenting high quality student work | Teaching inquiry based social studies and science | Developing a professional community | | |
| | Producing and presenting high quality student work | Teaching inquiry based social studies and science | | |
| | Using effective assessment practices | | | |

According to school leaders, one of their primary goals is to have assessment guide both students and teachers to the most effective ways of learning. As a result, the school uses comprehensive trimester progress reports, combined with an advisor's report on student progress toward the six character traits. These progress reports use specific language to evaluate student work: beginning, approaching, meeting, exceeding or work not accomplished. These terms were found throughout the school during the visit. FRCPS employs an extensive portfolio system that provides an additional vehicle to demonstrate what students know and are able to do. One example of this portfolio system is the use of a Passage Portfolio – a process whereby students present their portfolio to a panel of parents, teachers and peers to demonstrate their learning. This process is used when they move from grades 8, 10, and 12 and creates a strong vertical and horizontal articulation within the school.

FRCPS has made consistent progress by incorporating the Expeditionary Learning themes and matching them to both the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks and the daily planning for classroom instruction. In addition, they have maintained a rigorous level of classroom instruction throughout the school. They have also worked at providing a consistent approach to classroom performance, which is guided by continuous assessment and connections with parents.

5. All stakeholders express strong commitment to Expeditionary Learning (EL) and an even stronger willingness to strengthen its planning and implementation.

Expeditionary Learning (EL) at FRCPS is central to the academic program. The school has designated different expeditions at each grade level and, with the addition of grade twelve this year, the seniors will be working on individual senior expeditions that will culminate in presentations at the end of the year.

EL engages students in inquiry-based learning and promotes high achievement through active learning, character growth and teamwork. The goal of weaving EL into the curriculum supports and develops a school culture and, to a certain extent, promotes character development for moral and social responsibility. Each grade school-wide participates in EL projects over the course of the school year. Topics include: “What is Waste?” at grade 7; solar cooker design at grade 8; alternative fuel vehicles in grade 9; and, chemicals in the environment that affect health at grade 10. Students in grade 11 wrote a paper lobbying a senator about energy policy. The school has contracted with an EL consultant to provide ten days of support during the year and provides initial training during the summer for new staff and, also, to assist the veteran staff to deepen their understanding of how to successfully implement EL.

The team had the opportunity to interview the school’s EL consultant. Evidence supports the fact that EL provides a framework for how the school approaches planning and curriculum. Examples of student expeditions provide evidence that FRCPS has been highly successful with its implementation of the EL program. These student expeditions have served as models and exemplars for other schools. In addition, the team observed discussions in classrooms around EL – about different activities that students could create, such as a garden on school grounds, the creation of which would use principles of EL. With the first senior class in place, FRCPS has begun the process of a senior expedition. The team attended the first senior expedition meeting with students. The school and staff have created an extensive senior expedition that weaves the same skills that are taught as part of EL throughout the expedition. A teacher provided students with a detailed booklet that explained the expedition and outlined all of the steps in the project. The students, in turn, choose a topic, develop guiding questions and become expert on the topic. The students develop a binder and make a senior expedition presentation at the end of the year. There was ample evidence through interviews with teachers, Board members and parents that all stakeholders have a clear understanding of EL core practices.

Interviews with classroom teachers, however, revealed a trend in thinking that more depth could be added to the training and professional development. The teachers indicated that, because there are changes in staff, the veteran staff has a deeper degree of EL understanding. More veteran staff members, therefore, are interested in taking advantage of the next level of EL training to enhance their classroom instruction. EL training is provided in the summer for new staff, but more experienced staff indicated, “We are beyond the basics of EL and want to go to the next level.” There is no differentiation in EL training among newly-hired and veteran staff. Interviews with the leadership team indicated that they recognize the need for more differentiated – or specialized – EL training for staff. As a result, some perceive that there is a somewhat uneven approach to implementation of the EL model across grade levels. Interviews

of students in the upper grades indicated that there are fewer expeditions. The leadership team indicated that expanding EL training would have budget implications, but that they are considering this as an area of need.

6. A qualified and enthusiastic staff, composed of a mix of experienced and new teachers, has created classroom environments that promote learning in students with varied needs and abilities.

Staff members at Four Rivers Charter Public School work together to implement the curriculum, using Expeditionary Learning as an overarching focus to create classroom environments that are conducive to learning for all students. The EL approach allows students to access the curriculum through a variety of teaching styles and instructional modalities. The team noted that classrooms are positive learning environments and that students appear to be well supported.

During the site visit, the team observed 27 lessons. During these visit, the team observed that 93% of classrooms had learning objectives and/or agendas – either posted or presented – readily available to the students. The teachers made use of white boards in the classroom to list this information and referred to the board on a regular basis during the class period. Clear and concise explanations of the day’s objectives were present in 100% of the classrooms observed. In a mathematics class, for example, the student learning objectives were on the board and the teacher referenced them with the class. In the area of student behavior, 100% of classrooms observed exhibited that students had a clear understanding of the school’s behavioral expectations. Throughout the classroom visits, the team found students engaged and on task with no issues of misbehavior. Of the 27 lessons observed, the team noted that more than 80% of the students were highly engaged in the lesson, with one class having a mixed engagement level. The classes were also marked by 56% of the students being engaged in hands-on learning activities. In a science class, for example, the students were conducting a lab that involved testing of soil and its chemical nature. The team noted that 70% of the classes were marked by group work – either cooperative or unstructured. An example of this was an ELA class discussion on character. The class worked in pairs to discuss visualizing as it applies to writing. Of the 27 lessons observed, 26 of the classes made effective use of the instructional time. In a social studies class, for example, the teacher presented material about living conditions and assigned students an additional task which they moved to in an efficient manner. Classes were also marked by smooth transitions from activity to activity and from class to class. Although early in the year, students and teachers consistently showed that the students understood the importance of using their time to enhance their learning opportunities.

Interviews with school leaders revealed that they believe they are able to attract an energetic and talented staff. Teacher interviews indicated that they have what they need to teach. If materials are needed, they are able to access them. Teachers reported that their colleagues are enthusiastic and enjoy coming to work every day and that they are impressed by the high level of knowledge and skill found in their colleagues. Teachers who are new to the school reported feeling supported by their more experienced colleagues. Teachers reported being drawn to FRCPS to have hands-on learning and that the work was “...something bigger than the test.” The teachers indicated that there was a great deal of support for what they do in the classroom. They are given

the opportunity to set up course standards for each of the trimesters. At the same time, the teachers indicated, "...Communication across grade levels ensures consistency and attention to standards." The teachers also felt that there is a "good scaffolding in place" to support and develop the curriculum. The nature of the school allows for support from colleagues – both on an informal basis (talking at lunch, after school, between classes) to more formalized ways (department meetings, grade-level meetings, professional development).

7. Students are key participants in their learning and are responsible for assessing their overall achievement and reaching of their goals.

In addition to regular classroom instruction, FRCPS students also receive HOWLS (Habits of Work and Learning). The Four Rivers Field Guide indicated that these are standards related to organization, participation and preparation. In addition, The HOWLS serve as indicators as to whether the student is taking responsibility for revision to help create their best work. There is a regular, ongoing revision process in which students participate, and high school students demonstrating positive work habits are offered an intensive revision period called ACS (Academic Support and Challenge) if they need it at the end of each trimester.

Guided by their teachers, FRCPS provides the opportunity for student-led conferences. These conferences are held midway through the first and second trimesters. In reviewing the supporting document, the students provide their key character virtues. The students also provide an example of work that represents their strength and a description of how this work represents their strength as a learner. In the area of challenges, they again provide samples of this work and explain how they feel this is true. During the conference, they also look at their HOWLS (Habits of Work and Learning) and highlight areas that need improvement. At the end of the conference, they indicate an academic goal and a character goal for the year. The student provides information as to what needs to be done to achieve the goal and who can help and how.

In reviewing information on assessment, the team found that, in addition to the student-led conferences, comprehensive progress reports are issued at the end of each trimester. These reports include each subject area with a course description, a narrative comment, and grading on each course standard and the advisor's report on the student's progress on the school's six character traits.

The students are also responsible for maintaining their portfolios and in the school's written description, "Portfolios provide information about student learning that test scores alone cannot show, such as quality of their thinking and effort over time." Students each select exemplary pieces for each class. The students are responsible for a Passage Portfolio at the end of grades 8, 10 and 12. The students must demonstrate their readiness to pass on to the next division or graduate. This Passage Portfolio is presented to parents, teachers and peers. As the school's description indicates, "Passage Portfolios are designed to foster reflection and to document improvement and growth over time."

RENEWAL QUESTION 2: IS THE SCHOOL A VIABLE ORGANIZATION?

1. The ideals contained in the founding mission continue to be at the forefront of the day-to-day operation of the Four Rivers Charter Public School. All stakeholders share a common understanding and commitment to those ideals.

There is a clear understanding of, and an unwavering commitment to, the mission at Four Rivers Charter Public School. Without exception, all stakeholder groups that met with the team were able to articulate the school's mission and provide insight into its implementation across the curricula and in daily practices in the school.

Interviews with all stakeholders indicated an understanding of the school's mission and how it is communicated. Parents reported that "the kids are the keeper of the mission" and that the "staff communicates the spirit of the community." The school's Board of Trustees demonstrates clarity around the mission and how it supports the daily operation of the school. They referenced the Expeditionary Learning program and mentioned the three themes: nature, technology and community. Most students are aware of the mission of the school and how their classes are impacted through the mission. A student, for example indicated that students could get help and that they were "nice" to each other. In focus group interviews, teachers understood that the mission revolved around EL and how members of the leadership team "keep the core value of the mission present in all they do." A first-year teacher indicated that "faculty interaction and support is huge." The teacher felt there was a sense of community and a "willingness to help each other." In supporting the mission, a veteran staff member indicated, "We are so attentive to our students and there is a high degree of caring between teachers and students."

Tied to the ideals and mission are the schools clear character virtues of perseverance, respect, responsibility, compassion, courage – which are all tied to an overarching character virtue of integrity. The staff supports these ideals through various instances of "catching students being good" and recognition of students with a Polaris Award. A Polaris Award is an award that may be given by students to students or teachers to students. These awards recognize a display of courageousness, perseverance and the like. These awards are an important part of the FRCPS weekly community meetings, which help to convey the essence of the school's mission. FRCPS takes the opportunity during their weekly community meetings to recognize students. Community meetings provide a school-wide opportunity for communication, announcements, student recognition and an opportunity for students to raise concerns or questions about upcoming trips or plans.

FRCPS has developed a strong advisory program. Each student is a member of an advisory crew that supports students on a daily basis. The advisory crew provides students a one-to-one relationship with an adult advisor. Each day begins with a short meeting or "check-in" to see how students are doing and often is used for team building activities. Each staff member has an advisory crew that is designed to provide a safety net for students and provide staff with a more in-depth opportunity to get to know students and to build individual relationships.

2. Four Rivers Charter Public School has established a climate characterized by widespread expressions of safety, trust and concern for the well-being of others. These ideas are supported within a school culture that is committed to high expectations for the personal and intellectual growth of all students.

The teacher, staff and administrative contribution to the overall culture and climate of the school is significant. In focus groups, teachers reported that, “all faculty is on board with the mission.” The teachers further emphasized, “All the teachers create an environment to facilitate teaching and learning.” The staff was also encouraged by the opportunity to be part of the decision-making process. A first-year teacher indicated, “Faculty enthusiasm is huge for me.” The returning staff members write a welcome letter to new staff members, offering support and encouragement and a willingness to help in any way they can. There is a positive sense among faculty about: the leadership of the Executive Director (who has been all things to all people); the inner strength of the new Principal; and, the willingness to do everything by the Assistant Principal. Teachers reported that they could make individual decisions, but that the Executive Director made final decisions.

Focus groups of teachers, school leaders and the Board revealed a consistent response to the notion of a definite commitment to high expectations – both inside and outside the classroom. When asked about their academic program, students reported feeling that, sometimes, the difficulty level of their work was somewhat mixed. Students also reported, however, that they usually felt challenged and supported in their work. In student focus groups, they talked about expanded opportunities to go beyond the assignment and felt they could ask questions or clarification at any time during the school day. The students felt that they had sufficient support to be successful. Supports for students – such as HOWLS (Habits of Work and Learning) and weekly ASCs (Academic Support and Challenge), which are similar to directed study halls – are in place. Students are able to use these dedicated times to seek help with their coursework. Students reported that they are able to access a lot of help if needed. They also mentioned the importance of interacting with other EL schools. They felt that the teachers cared about them – both as a student and as a person. The students indicated that they felt safe at the school and that “people are nice here...you can fit in here...they are welcoming.”

Parents expressed an understanding of what their children were learning at school in terms of the learning environment, and mentioned specific items such as: academic rigor, rubrics, long-range goals, portfolios and decision-making power. The parents also talked about the importance of community meetings and how that process helps to “make a right from a wrong.” They also discussed the school’s advisory program, which has provided a vehicle for students to set up school dances, become involved in school-based community projects and become active participants in student-led conferences. One parent stated, “I was blown away by the student-led conference. I was learning from my child what they were doing, what they needed to work on, and what goals they were setting.”

Parents also discussed their overall satisfaction with the school. They noted the various ways the school works to support the development of a strong school culture. The spring 2007 parent survey demonstrated that parents gave the school high marks in several specific areas: positive

social and emotional growth (96%); helping child to grow as a person and develop strengths (96%); and clear behavioral expectations (91%). Furthermore, parents indicated that they felt their child was safe and that there was a high degree of trust. They did feel there wasn't any bullying at the school and that there was a high degree of acceptance for all students. FRCPS maintains a family council that meets once a month with an average attendance of ten parents – with a different group of parents in attendance each month. The meetings are agenda-driven. Communication usually occurs through e-mail and monthly newsletters.

3 Under the steady guidance of the Board of Trustees, the Director of Operations and the school's two founders (the current Executive Director and the HS Assistant Principal), the leadership of FRCPS has made necessary adjustments to ensure the existence of efficient systems in the areas of planning, discipline and decision making.

FRCPS has grown rapidly over the past four years. As planned in their original charter, student enrollment has increased from 64 students in year one (grades 7 and 8) to 192 students in year five (grades 9-12). By adding one grade each year in each of the last five years, the school now is poised to graduate their first twelfth grade class in the spring of 2008. In this short span, FRCPS has constructed two additional buildings on campus and has hired new teachers and staff to fully support the needs of a middle school and high school.

FRCPS has steadily employed three people who have been primarily responsible for planning throughout the school: the Director/Executive Director, Assistant Director/Assistant Principal and Director of Operations. The position of Executive Director is, by design, a guiding force between the Board, the staff and the students. The Director of Operations has maintained accurate and detailed records for the financial management of the school, including a strong rapport with the Board, the maintenance of accurate accounting of the funds, and the recognition of the school's long-range needs, such as investigating sources of revenue and establishing lines of credit with the local bank in the event of a gap between when tuition payments arrive and when payrolls are due to be paid. The Assistant Principal serves in many capacities, all of which are directed at the goal of fully achieving the original mission of the school. The Assistant Principal handles issues related to the practice of sound curriculum, instruction and assessment, as well as issues related to the emotional and social growth of students and has consistently supported the advisory program, service learning and the senior expedition.

In 2006, a survey distributed to teachers by the Board revealed that teachers were concerned about school discipline, response to issues, the overall communication process, a need for more systematic support for the Expeditionary Learning program and the day-to-day operation of the school. This was corroborated by interviews with teachers, who indicated that they would often wait for approval of an event or were not informed until the last minute when an event was planned. The Board, with support from the Director, restructured the leadership team by adding a Dean of Students and increased the Assistant Principal's time at the school. A new role for coordinating discipline in middle school was added in 2006, as was an expanded role for the Assistant Principal in coordinating discipline in the high school. In 2007-08, following the recommendations of a board task force on administrative structures, the position of Principal was added to serve as the instructional leader, and the former Director became Executive Director.

The school's leadership team now includes an Executive Director, Principal, Assistant Principal, Director of Operations and Dean of Students.

These changes mark a departure from the very early years of operation, when FRCPS was a small school with a small group making decisions to a larger group with designated responsibilities, corresponding with the school's dramatic growth. The leadership team has designed specific roles and responsibilities for each leadership position and has helped create a more stable leadership structure. At the time of the site visit, teachers reported that they are already seeing a positive impact on the school as a result of these changes.

In the area of school-wide decision making, school leaders have defined a variety of working teams to help with the overall management of the school. They have defined membership, meeting times, chair, roles and responsibilities of each working team. These working teams include: full faculty, divisional faculty (I, II, III), curriculum committees, special education team and leadership team. The leadership team reported that, through these teams, the school has become one that is a faculty-led school. During the hiring process for the new principal, the teachers had the opportunity to provide input into what type of candidate they felt the school should hire. Teachers were also involved in the interview process and provided interview questions for candidates. Teachers reported that, prior to the current school year, school leaders were not often present in classrooms. At the time of the site visit, teachers reported that past practice has changed. School leaders are far more visible in classrooms. Also, the Principal has begun informal classroom visits and teachers have received immediate feedback.

4. Four Rivers Charter Public School Board of Trustees has established sound governance practices that have enabled the school to acquire the facilities, resources and space necessary to fulfill the mission of the school. The Board enjoys a collegial working relationship with the Executive Director and the Director of Operations.

The FRCPS Board of Trustees reported that they have established a specific understanding of their role. The Board was able to articulate the mission and was able to demonstrate an understanding of how the school actualizes the mission. The Board reported that they have a sense of the pulse of the school. A Board member indicated that they have a specific understanding of their role to oversee finances, to oversee the development of a strategic plan, and to provide some oversight over the day-to-day operations of the school. The Board was also able to articulate an understanding of how Expeditionary Learning fits into the overall mission of the school.

The Board has enjoyed a strong collaborative relationship with the Director of Operations and the Executive Director, built upon a foundation that each support the mission and support the day-to-day operation of the school. At the Board's monthly meetings, the Director of Operations provides an update of the finances and the long-range projections of expenses through the use of a five-year trend and budget model. Interviews with the Board and the Director of Operations indicated a goal of having a cash reserve equivalent to three months' operating expenses by the end of the 5th year. However, due to ongoing projects (i.e., construction of the different buildings), this goal has not always been met. The Board felt that they are now in a more stable

financial situation and have a better opportunity to create the cash reserve equivalent since the school has reached full enrollment and there are currently no plans in place for the construction of additional buildings.

The Board has also participated in Board development activities. Last May, Board members participated in a retreat in which they began working on strategic objectives. The Board of Trustees has developed strong oversight of the school. Board members recognized the importance of developing a strategic plan as an important step. During the May retreat, they created a strategic plan that included specific strategic objectives focusing on: finances, the new administration re-organization plan, declining mathematics scores and the importance of disseminating information (i.e., “What are we doing? How do we let people know about our best practices?”)

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

In addition to academic performance and organizational viability goals, the Four Rivers Charter Public School has three goals in its accountability plan to ensure faithfulness to the charter.

1. There is evidence that the school and its students are addressing and meeting almost all of the goals designed to ensure faithfulness to the terms of the charter.

The school has established three goals and related indicators, most of which are measurable, to ensure faithfulness to the charter:

Goal 1: Four Rivers Charter Public School will use the themes of nature, technology and community to engage and advance student learning.

Indicator:

- Once per year, all students will complete individual or small group projects that address the essential question in the school's mission: *How do we find the healthy, fruitful interrelationship of the natural world, technology in its many forms and the human community?* Ninety percent of these projects will be of *Meeting* quality, as judged by the evaluations of experts and visitors to the school.

The school has begun to integrate the three themes of nature, technology and community into the academic program. Through the school's curriculum, which integrates a variety of content areas into Expeditionary Learning experiences, students frequently engage in activities and projects that promote and integrate these themes. Across grade levels, FRCPS students participated in the following projects in the 2006-07 school year: a grade 7 learning expedition was designed to have students analyze the school's waste stream; students in the 8th grade competed in a solar cooker design challenge; grade 9 research projects asked students to explore alternative-fuel vehicles; grade 10 students participated in research projects to determine how environmental chemicals affect health; and, 11th grade students acted collaboratively to write a paper to a senator, lobbying an energy policy.

At the time of the site visit, 80 percent of student projects are of *Meeting* quality, completing goals addressing the school themes.

Goal 2: Four Rivers Charter Public School will engage students in character growth and service to the school and community.

Indicators:

- Students will engage in effective goal setting for personal and academic growth, as documented in advisory records and student-led conferences.
- The school will maintain a positive school culture, as reflected in an annual survey of parents and students, student and faculty retention and observations by visiting educators.
- Students will participate in service activities within the school and in the Franklin County community, as documented by advisory records and portfolios.

Students at FRCPS are active participants in the learning experiences. Students, teachers and school leaders indicated that students engage in goal-setting activities. A review of a sample of student advisory records further corroborated that students were (or were working toward) engaging in effective goals setting and that this information was being tracked.

Annual parent surveys conducted across the charter term indicated strong support for, and satisfaction with, the school's program. For example:

- In 2007, 98 percent of the parents surveyed agreed or strongly agreed that *"The school succeeds in creating a positive social and emotional environment."* In 2006, 2005 and 2004, 84 percent, 94 percent and 94 percent of respondents, respectively, agreed or strongly agreed with this statement.
- In 2007, 96 percent parents surveyed agreed or strongly agreed, that *"The school is helping my child grow as a person and develop his or her strengths."* In 2006, 2005 and 2004, 86 percent, 92 percent and 88 percent of respondents, respectively, agreed or strongly agreed with this statement.
- In 2007, 98 of parents surveyed agreed or strongly agreed that *"I believe that at least one of my child's teachers knows and understands him or her well."* In 2006, 2005 and 2004, 89 percent, 94 percent and 88 percent of respondents, respectively, agreed or strongly agreed with this statement.

Student retention at FRCPS has remained strong across the charter term. In the 2004-05 school year, only one student left the school. In the 2005-06 and the 2006-07 school years, only seven students left the school. At the same time, FRCPS was adding additional grade levels, thereby continuing to increase enrollment while re-enrolling the majority of its students. A student survey conducted in 2006 indicated that most students feel positively about their experience at the school. For example: 91 percent of students agreed or strongly agreed that *"I feel safe and comfortable at Four Rivers;"* 87.5 percent of students agreed or strongly agreed *"I feel that I fit in and have friends at Four Rivers;"* and 72 percent of the students agreed or strongly agreed, *"At least one of my teachers knows and understands me pretty well."*

Finally, staff retention at FRCPS has remained strong since the school's inception, while also adding staff as student enrollment increased. The school has maintained at least a 75 percent retention rate for staff.

Goal 3: Four Rivers Charter Public School will implement and disseminate Expeditionary Learning core practices.

Indicators:

- The school will continue to improve its implementation of Expeditionary Learning core practices, as evidenced in the annual implementation review scoring by Expeditionary Learning consultants.
- The school will disseminate practices and products expressive of high quality Expeditionary Learning core practices to other schools and communities annually.

As previously reported, Expeditionary Learning is central to the academic program at FRCPS. While teachers consistently use EL, school leaders and teachers reported that the quality and level of implementation is directly related to the length of time the teacher has worked at the school. Logically, this is directly correlated to the amount of training and support teachers have received in implementing the EL design. In a given school year, Expeditionary Learning consultants rated the school's implementation of the Expeditionary Learning core practices: active pedagogy, school culture and character, leadership, and school improvement and structures. On a scale of from 0-4, the school earned an average rating of 2.4. FRCPS continues to use its existing staff to support the new teachers in learning, mastering and continuing to improve the implementation of Expeditionary Learning.

FRCPS has engaged in disseminating Expeditionary Learning practices to other schools and communities. This has included both national and local presentations. Staff members have delivered a presentation to a master class of educators from across the country at the national Expeditionary Learning conferences, as well as at the Massachusetts Charter School Association's Best Practices Showcase. The final product of a learning expedition that investigated species found in the Connecticut River's watershed is a CD that is being distributed to a local environmental center, area schools and libraries as a resource for other students or those interested in EL education design. In addition, FRCPS students collaborated with a local organization to implement a "Road to Freedom" photo/text exhibit that is on tour nationally in universities and museums.

2. Four Rivers Charter Public School has been incorporating its three themes – nature, technology and community – into the daily life of the school.

Goal 10: Four Rivers Charter Public School will use the themes of nature, technology and community to engage and advance student learning.

Indicator:

- Once per year, all students will complete individual or small group projects that address the essential question in the school's mission: *How do we find the healthy, fruitful interrelationship of the natural world technology in its many forms and the human community?* Ninety percent of these projects will be of *Meeting* quality, as judged by the evaluations of experts and visitors to the school.

The school has begun to use the three themes as a means of engaging students in meaningful investigations through making connections to science to social studies to English. As the school continues to mature, it will make further progress in this goal. Presently, the school has 80% of the students completing goals addressing the school themes. The judging was completed by faculty members and some experts and at the level as the indicator stated.

The theme projects for the 2006-07 school year included the following: grade 7 – "What is waste?" – a learning expedition analyzing the school's waste stream; grade 8 – solar cooker design challenge; grade 9 – research projects on alternative fuel vehicles; grade 10 – research projects on how chemicals in the environment affect health; and, grade 11 – project in which students wrote a paper, lobbying a senator about an energy policy.

3. Four Rivers has been incorporating the ideas of character and community as stated in their mission.

Goal 11: Four Rivers Charter Public School will engage students in character growth and service to the school and the community.

Indicator:

- Students will engage in effective goal setting for personal and academic growth, as documented in advisory records and student-led conferences.

As reported by the three advisories at each grade, 805 of the 7th graders were able to engage in effective goal setting; 100% of 8th graders, 97% of the 9th graders, 75% of the 10th graders and 70% of the 11th graders met the goal. This averages out to 84% across all grades. The effectiveness of the goal setting was observed through personal and academic growth, as noted in advisory records and experienced through the instances of student-led conferences.

Indicator:

- The school will maintain a positive school culture, as reflected in an annual survey of parents and students, student and faculty retention and observations by visiting educators.

The school conducted a parent survey in June 2007 and noted the following significant findings:

- 98% of the parents agreed or strongly agreed, *“The school succeeds in creating a positive social and emotional environment.”* (84% in 2006) (94% 2005) (94% 2004)
- 96% of the parents agreed or strongly agreed, *“The school is helping my child grow as a person and develop his or her strengths.”* (86% in 2006) (92% 2005) (88% 2004)
- 98% of parents agreed or strongly agreed, *“I believe that at least one of my child’s teachers knows and understands him or her well.”* (89% in 2006) (94% 2005) (88% 2004)

In viewing the responses over time (from 2004 to 2007), it is evident that the school has made a strong sense of community that is consistent with the mission statement. The school is also looking into ways of having a larger response to the surveys and will be developing an approach during the 2007-08 school year.

The school did not conduct a survey of students in 2007 due to the rush of testing and end-of-year activities. However, a student survey was conducted in 2006. The following findings are presented:

- 91% of the students responding agreed or strongly agreed with: *“I feel safe and comfortable at Four Rivers.”*
- 87.5% of the students responding agreed or strongly agreed with: *“I feel that I fit in and have friends at Four Rivers.”*
- 72% of the students responding agreed or strongly agreed with: *“At least one of my teachers knows and understands me pretty well.”*
- 74% of the students responding agreed or strongly agreed with: *“Expectations for behavior at the school are clear.”*

The importance of the student survey cannot be overlooked, regardless of the other constraints. In order to see if the school is progressing over time, such survey information helps to get a picture of what students see as significant.

Student turnover data indicate the following: in 2004–05, one student left and the population stayed at 102 students for the year; in 2005–06, seven students left and the population stayed at 134 students for the year; in 2006–07, seven students left and the population stayed at 161 students for the year.

The school also maintains a high return rate for full-time staff: in 2004-05, 6 of 8, or 75%; in 2005-06, 11 of 11, or 100%; and, in 2006-07, 12 of 15, or 75%.

Each annual report has highlighted observations of visiting educators. In 2005, an honors student from the University of Massachusetts noted that there is "...strong evidence of a positive school culture." In 2006, three graduate students from Antioch New English Graduate School noted, "We were hard pressed to find a student who did not speak highly their Four Rivers experience..." In 2007, a Health Educator observed the school and noted, "As an educator, I find the application of knowledge into students' lives inspiring..."

4. Four Rivers has been incorporating the ideas of Expeditionary Learning across their curricula.

Goal 12: The school will implement and disseminate Expeditionary Learning core practices.

Indicator:

- The school will continue to improve the implementation review of FRCPS conducted by Expeditionary Learning. The results continue to be positive and affirming of our faculty's efforts.

After conducting the fourth Implementation review of FRCPS, there was a positive sense, which affirmed the faculty's efforts in this area. On a scale of from 0-4, the school earned an average rating of 2.4 for the core practices of EL: active pedagogy, school culture and character, leadership and school improvement, and structures.

It has been noted that the implementation of EL is directly related to the length of time a teacher has worked at FRCPS. This is due to amount of training and support a new teacher needs in order to implement the program. The school continues to use its existing staff to support the new teachers in learning the different aspects of the EL program.

5. Four Rivers has consistently met the measures for viability as defined by the organizational goals in the accountability plan. The only exception is the maintaining of a three-month cash reserve for expenses.

Goal 8: The Board of Trustees, as the governing body of Four Rivers Charter Public School, will fulfill its responsibilities to set policies, monitor progress and plan effectively for the needs of the school.

Indicator:

- The Board will meet monthly and maintain membership consistent with the by-laws.

The Board met every month of the year except in August. It maintained its 10 members except for a short period in the Fall of 2006, when membership fell to 9.

Indicator:

- The Board will set goals annually with the school Director and will evaluate the Director.

Annual goals were set with the Director and the evaluation was completed in the summer of 2007.

Indicator:

- The Board will oversee the accountability plan through semi-annual reports from the Director.

Annual reports are reviewed each summer and the Board has the opportunity to review the accountability plan. During the year, other information is provided by the Director to the Board, such as the first 10th grade MCAS score and preparation for the application for charter renewal. A task force of the Board advised the Director on revisions to the accountability plan to be included with the charter renewal application.

Goal 9: Four Rivers Charter Public School will be a fiscally sound and solvent organization.

Indicator:

- Annual expenditures, excluding depreciation, will not exceed annual revenues.

The annual expenditures in 2006–07 have not exceeded revenues.

Indicator:

- By the end of the fifth year, the school will attain a cash reserve equivalent to three months' operating expenses.

The Finance Committee and Director of Operations have managed the available funds this year so that minimal borrowing was necessary. By establishing a line of credit with a local bank, they were able to access funds when the end of quarter expenses did not coincide with quarterly tuition payments. The total cost for short-term borrowing for the year was \$521. Their long-range plan is to cover three months of operating expenses to eliminate any borrowing.

Indicator:

- The school will meet the annual fundraising goals established by the Board of Trustees in the annual approved operating budget.

The annual fund established a \$34,000 goal this year. This goal was exceeded by the school.

Indicator:

- The annual independent audit for FRCPS will report no major findings.

Each year, the Four Rivers Charter Public School has had a clean audit. The audit for 2006 reported no major findings.

6. Four Rivers Charter Public School has begun the process of dissemination of its best practices.

Goal 12: The school will implement and disseminate Expeditionary Learning core practices.

FRCPS faculty members continue to disseminate Expeditionary Learning practices to other schools and communities. This school year, four teachers presented two master classes (two teachers per class) to educators from across the country attending the Expeditionary learning National Conference in March. Both sets of presenters received very high ratings from those attending.

A high school science teacher presented a workshop on an investigation into alternative fuel vehicles to the Massachusetts Charter School Association's best Practices Showcase in March 2007.

Under teacher guidance, students from FRCPS collaborated with a local organization to put forward a "Road to Freedom" photo/text exhibit that is on tour nationally in universities and museums.

A teacher completed an interdisciplinary learning expedition called "Watershed Wildlife," which was an illustrated investigation of species found in the Connecticut Rivers watershed. The final product of the expedition is a CD which is being distributed to a local environmental center, area schools and libraries as a resource for students and a vivid representation of EL practices.

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

1. The goals of the FRCPS newly-proposed accountability plan are rigorous and will be challenging for the school to meet.

School leaders have submitted a revised accountability plan for the second charter term. An examination of the document showed that school leaders have developed accountability goals that are measurable, credible and rigorous. In the school's initial accountability plan, two separate goals – written for reading and writing – had much overlap. In the new plan, the school has reorganized its reading and writing goals, incorporating them into one goal. The goal also increases the percentage of students who have attended FRCPS for at least two years who will attain Proficiency on the ELA MCAS test at grade 10 from 70 to 75 percent. An additional indicator was added to this goal to increase accountability for additional grade levels – 65 percent of the 8th grade students will attain Proficiency on the ELA MCAS and at least 90 percent will pass. In mathematics, the goal remained the same, but the related indicators also reflect an increase in rigor. The percentage of students who have been enrolled at FRCPS for at least two years who will attain Proficiency on the mathematics MCAS test at grade 10 will increase from 60 to 65 percent. Additionally, an indicator was added for grade 8 students – 60 percent of 8th grade students will attain Proficiency on the mathematics MCAS exam and at least 90 percent will pass.

FRCPS has also chosen to eliminate from their accountability plan all indicators that reference TerraNova testing. School leaders cited that they were not always sure how to translate TerraNova results in a meaningful way. They were unsure why a particular group scored higher or lower in any particular year. They are investigating whether a more appropriate diagnostic test would be helpful in evaluating student achievement, identifying gaps in students' skills and knowledge, identifying student performance trends school-wide and supporting student learning.

The goals in the proposed accountability plan reflect the school's commitment to high academic standards for all students. The Executive Director and members of his leadership team are working hard to put systems in place to support student learning.

2. School leadership at FRCPS demonstrates an unwavering commitment to the mission of the school and has the capacity to guide the school in a new charter term.

It is the judgment of the team that FRCPS has the capacity to achieve many of the goals outlined in its accountability plan. School leaders have been strategic in expanding their leadership team and hiring staff who will commit to the school's mission and incorporate Expeditionary Learning in their approach to teaching and creating a culture and climate conducive to learning and collegiality. There is ample evidence to show that they are committed to increasing academic rigor and researching different ways to use student achievement data to make instruction meaningful for students.

In summary, the FRCPS community has positioned itself to be very successful. They have recognized the need to make adjustments to their leadership structure, are guided by sound and

consistent financial practices, and have a Board of Trustees that recognizes its role. With the current staff, there is an opportunity for embedded professional development and growth in the area of best practices and connection to Expeditionary Learning. All stakeholders are interested in helping each other and helping the students to be successful. The school and the leadership team are positioned to move the school even further in a positive direction.

APPENDIX A: SCHEDULE OF THE RENEWAL INSPECTION VISIT

Tuesday, October 9, 2007

| Time | Team Member A | Team Member B | Team Member C | Team Member D |
|-------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| 12:00 | Hotel Check-in | | | |
| 12:30-2:30 | Initial Team Meeting | | | |
| 3:00-4:00 | Initial Meeting with School Leaders | | | |
| 4:00-6:00 | Team Meeting & Debrief | | | |
| 6:00 | Team Departure/Dinner | | | |

Wednesday, October 10, 2007

| Time | Team Member A | Team Member B | Team Member C | Team Member D |
|--------------------|--|---------------------------------------|--|---|
| 7:30-8:00 | Team arrival & preparation | | | |
| 8:10-8:40 | Observe Grade 11 Math | Observe Grade 11 – Chemistry | Observe Grade 7 ELA, | Observe Grade 7 Math |
| 8:40-9:02 | | | | |
| 9:02-9:30 | Observe Grade 12 - ELA | Observe Grade 12 – SS | Observe Grade 7 SS (ends 9:50) Same as above | Observe Grade 7 Sci (ends 9:50) Same as above |
| 9:30-10:00 | | | | |
| 10:00-10:30 | Interview Guidance | | Interview Business Manager | |
| 10:30-11:00 | | | | |
| 11:00-12:18 | Team Lunch & Debrief | | | |
| 12:18-12:48 | Observe Spanish 3, Grades 10,11,12 | Observe Gr 11- 12 Consumer Math | Document Review | |
| 12:48-1:10 | Document Review | | Interview Gr. 7 Teachers | |
| 1:10-1:35 | Interview –Expeditionary Learning (1:00 – 2:00) | | Interview Gr. 8 Teachers | |
| 2:00-3:00 | Interview Faculty Leadership Team | | | |
| 3:00-4:00 | Interview Special Education Staff | | | |
| 4:00-6:00 | Team Debrief | | | |
| 6:00 | Departure | | | |

Thursday, October 11, 2007

| Time | Team Member A | Team Member B | Team Member C | Team Member D |
|--------------------|---|--|--|--|
| 7:30-8:00 | Team arrival & preparation | | | |
| 8:10-8:45 | HS Student Interview | MS Student Interview | Parent Interview In Library | |
| 8:50-9:30 | Observe Grade 9 ELA | Observe Grade 9 Math | Observe Grade 8 ELA | Observe Grade 8 Math |
| 9:30-10:00 | Observe Grade 10 SS | Observe Grade 10 Biology | Observe Grade 8 SS, | Observe Grade 8 Sci, |
| 10:00-10:30 | Observe Grade 10 Math | Observe Grade 10 ELA | Teacher & room as above <i>(ends 10:15)</i> | Teacher & room as above <i>(ends 10:15)</i> |
| 10:30-11:00 | Observe Grade 9 SS | Observe Grade 9 Environmental Sci | Observe Grade 8 Spanish | Observe Grade 7-8 Phys Ed |
| 11:00-12:18 | Team Lunch & Debrief | | | |
| 12:18-12:48 | Observe Gr 11-12 CTEW (Writing) <i>(Ends at 1:10)</i> | Observe Gr 10-11 Spanish 2 | Feedback to School Leaders <i>(12:30-1:10)</i> | |
| 12:48-1:10 | Interview Grade 9-10 SS & Sci Teachers | | | |
| 1:10-1:35 | Interview Grade 9-10 ELA & Math Teachers | | Interview College Counselor & Assistant Principal for High School re Senior year and post-grad planning | |
| 1:35-2:05 | Interview Grade 11-12 SS & Sci Teachers | | Visit 7th and/or 8th 2nd Core Classes | |
| 2:08-2:30 | Interview Grade 11-12 Math & ELA Teachers | | <i>Additional interviews with students and/or faculty?</i> | |
| 2:30-4:30 | Team Debrief | | | |
| 4:30-5:30 | Interview Board of Trustees | | | |
| 5:30-6:00 | Team Debrief & Departure | | | |

Friday, October 12, 2007

| Time | Team Member A | Team Member B | Team Member C | Team Member D |
|---------------|---|---------------------------------------|---|--------------------------|
| 7:30-8:00 | Team arrival & preparation | | | |
| 8:10-8:40 | Observe HS Community Mtg In Common Room | Document Review | Observe Grade 7/8 Community Meeting 7th Math/Science Rm | |
| 8:40-9:02 | Observe Grade 12 Sen X (Senior Expedition Plan) In Common Room | Observe Grade 12 Chemistry | Document Review | Document Review |
| 9:02-10:00 | Feedback to School Leaders | | Feedback to School Leaders | |
| 10:00-10:30 | Team Debrief | | | |
| 10:45 – 11:15 | Observe Grade 7- 8 Tribs – Float | | Observe Grade 7-8 Tribs – Float | |
| 11:30 – 3:00 | Team Debrief & Lunch | | | |
| 3:00 | Team Departure | | | |