

**NEW ENGLAND ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS AND
COLLEGES**

COMMISSION ON PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS

REPORT OF THE VISITING COMMITTEE

Francis W. Parker Charter Essential School

Devens, MA

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STATEMENT OF LIMITATIONS

THE DISTRIBUTION, USE, AND SCOPE OF THE VISITING COMMITTEE REPORT

The Commission on Public Secondary Schools of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges considers this visiting committee report of Francis W. Parker Charter Essential School to be a privileged document submitted by the Commission on Public Secondary Schools of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges to the principal of the school and by the principal to the state department of education. Distribution of the report within the school community is the responsibility of the school principal. The final visiting committee report must be released in its entirety within sixty (60) days of its completion to the superintendent, school board, public library or town office, and the appropriate news media.

The prime concern of the visiting committee has been to assess the quality of the educational program at Francis W. Parker Charter Essential School in terms of the school's stated mission and the Commission's Standards for Accreditation. Neither the total report nor any of its subsections is to be considered an evaluation of any individual staff member but rather a professional appraisal of the school as it appeared to the visiting team.

INTRODUCTION

The New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) is the oldest of the six regional accrediting agencies in the United States. Since its inception in 1885, the Association has awarded membership and accreditation to those educational institutions in the six-state New England Region that seek voluntary affiliation.

The governing body of the Association is its Board of Trustees which supervises the work of five Commissions: the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education (CIHE), the Commission on Independent Schools (CIS), the Commission on Public Secondary Schools (CPSS), the Commission on Technical and Career Institutions (CTCI), and the Commission on Public Elementary Schools (CPES).

As the responsible agency for matters of the evaluation and accreditation of public secondary school member institutions, CPSS requires visiting committees to assess the degree to which the evaluated schools meet the qualitative Standards for Accreditation of the Commission. Those Standards are:

Teaching and Learning Standards

- Mission and Expectations for Student Learning

- Curriculum

- Instruction

- Assessment of Student Learning

Support Standards

- Leadership and Organization

- School Resources for Learning

- Community Resources for Learning

The accreditation program for public schools involves a threefold process: the self-study conducted by the local professional staff, the on-site evaluation conducted by the Commission's visiting committee, and the follow-up program carried out by the school to implement the findings of its own self-study and the valid recommendations of the visiting committee and those identified by the Commission in the Follow-Up process. Continued accreditation requires that the school be reevaluated at least once every ten years and that it show continued progress addressing identified needs.

Preparation for the Evaluation Visit – The School Self-Study

A steering committee of the professional staff was appointed to supervise the myriad details inherent in the school's self-study. At Parker School, a committee of eleven (11) members, with the principal serving in an *ex-officio* capacity, supervised all aspects of the self-study. The steering committee assigned all teachers and administrators in the school to appropriate subcommittees to determine the quality of all programs, activities, and facilities available for young people. In addition to faculty members, the self-study committees included two administrators, six teachers, and three community representatives.

The self-study of Parker School extended over a period of 24 school months from September 2000 to September 2002. The final report from this self-study took on a user-friendly form presented in a four-inch wide three-ring binder. The quality of the detailed material submitted to support the self-study compliance with the teaching, learning, and support standards was superior.

Public schools evaluated by the Commission on Public Secondary Schools must complete appropriate materials to assess their adherence to the Standards for Accreditation and the quality of their educational offerings in light of the school's mission, learning expectations, and unique student population. In addition to using the Self-study Guides developed by a representative group of New England educators and approved by the Commission, Parker School also used questionnaires developed by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges to reflect the concepts contained in the Standard for Accreditation. These materials provided discussion items for a comprehensive assessment of the school by the professional staff during the self-study.

It is important that the reader understand that every subcommittee appointed by the steering committee was required to present its report to the entire professional staff for approval. No single report developed in the self-study became part of the official self-study documents until it had been approved by the entire professional staff.

The Process Used by the Visiting Committee

A visiting committee of 14 evaluators was assigned by the Commission on Public Secondary Schools to evaluate the Parker School in light of the Commission's Standards for Accreditation. The committee members spent four days in Devens, reviewed the self-study documents which had been prepared for their examination, and met with administrators, teachers, other school and system personnel, students, and parents to determine the degree to which the school meets the Commission's Standards for Accreditation. Since the evaluators represented public schools and central office administrators, diverse points of view were brought to bear on the evaluation of Parker School.

The visiting team built its professional judgment on evidence collected from the following sources:

- review of the school's self-study materials
- a total of 60 hours of classroom observation
- numerous informal observations in and around the school
- tours of the facility
- shadowing of 12 students for a half day
- individual meetings with teachers about their work, instructional approaches, and the assessment of student learning
- group meetings with students, parents, school and district administrators, and teachers, and support staff

- examination of student work including a selection of work collected by the school

Each conclusion on the report was agreed to by team consensus. Sources of evidence for each conclusion drawn by the visiting committee appear in parenthesis in the Standards sections of the report. The seven Standards for Accreditation reports include commendations and recommendations that in the committee's judgment will be helpful to the school as it works to improve teaching and learning and to better meet Commission Standards.

This report of the findings of the visiting committee will be forwarded to the Commission on Public Secondary Schools that will make a decision on the accreditation of Parker School.

Overview of Findings

Quality of the Self-study

The self-study completed by the professional staff at Francis W. Parker Charter Essential School was done completely and carefully. Each report was thoroughly researched and included comments on each of the indicators for the standards. The self-study report and follow-up meetings with each of the subcommittees on the standards demonstrated the involvement of the whole staff in the self-study process. The commitment to the self-study was consistent with all the work done by the school. It was a collaborative process thoroughly done. The report shows evidence that students, parents, and trustees of the school were involved in the self-study.

Discussion of Significant Findings

Although the conclusions of the visiting committee on the school's adherence to the Commission's Standards for Accreditation appear in various sections of this report, the committee wishes to highlight some findings in the paragraphs that follow. These findings are not intended to be a summary of the report.

Teaching and Learning at Francis W. Parker Charter Essential School

The Ten Common Principles of the Coalition of Essential Schools serve as the mission of the Parker School. When the school was first granted its charter, the school's founders were clear that these principles would guide the school. In addition, the school states explicitly that the student's experience should be at the center of the school, with a deliberate focus on personalizing the education of students. To support the mission, the *Criteria for Excellence* have defined the academic expectations for students at the Parker School in reading, writing, research, oral presentation, artistic expression, listening, scientific investigation, mathematical problem-solving, mathematical communication, Spanish, technology, systems thinking, and wellness. The ten common principles and the criteria for excellence are evident in everything that is done in the school. In every class,

students are working towards meeting these criteria, and teachers are using the principles and criteria to lead their work. The mission of Parker School is articulated and understood by students, staff members, and parents.

Unlike many other schools where much of the curriculum was in place prior to developing a clear mission and academic expectations, the Parker School uses the mission and criteria for excellence to define the curriculum. As a result, the curriculum is very clearly tied to these criteria. The mission guides curriculum development with its emphasis on depth over breadth. The organization of the school into four domains (Arts and Humanities; Math, Science and Technology; Spanish; and Wellness) facilitates collaboration among teachers throughout the school. With common planning time provided in the school schedule as well as an extended period of time before school opens for teacher planning, teachers develop curriculum collaboratively. The curriculum is challenging and engaging for students, with increasing levels of complexity and independence as students move up through three distinct divisions.

Instruction at the Parker School is personalized to the greatest extent possible. With small class sizes and team teaching in many instances, teachers have the ability to design their instruction with an eye toward truly meeting the needs of all students. Instruction, curriculum, and assessment are fully integrated at the Parker School. In accordance with their mission, the primary role is “teacher as coach; student as worker.” Students are asked to demonstrate their understanding through many different types of exhibitions of their learning and are constantly encouraged to improve their work based on extensive feedback from their teachers. There is a culture of reflection and improvement for both students and staff; students expect to revise and improve their work, and staff members expect to get feedback from their peers about their work.

Assessment at the Parker School is seamless with curriculum and instruction as it should be. The student portfolios include many different kinds of assessment strategies, including brief assessments such as quizzes as well as extensive reports, pieces of artwork, summaries of oral presentations, and group projects. All of the assessments are tied directly to the criteria for excellence. Students know that all of their work is tied to meeting these criteria for excellence. Students move through the school not by advancing to the next grade, but by meeting requirements for “gateways” for each of the academic domains. Students complete the gateways when they (and their teachers) deem they are ready. The assessments are used effectively to improve curriculum and instruction because so much information can be gathered from these extensive assessments.

Support of Teaching and Learning at Francis W. Parker Charter Essential School

The leadership in the Parker School is very strong and distributed among the principal, the board of trustees, the staff, students, and parents. The principal is a caring, passionate educator who always acts in the best interests of the students. She has excellent relations with students, staff members, parents, and the board. The board of trustees includes the founders of the school, parents of current students, staff members, the principal, and students (non-voting). The school has been very deliberate about defining how decisions

are made with a primary goal of having decisions made by those most affected by the decision.

The organization of Parker School is clearly done with the best interests of students and teachers in mind. The schedule is simple yet meets the needs of the school. There is ample collaborative planning time for teachers during the school day as well as an extended time once per week when students are released early from school. The student load for teachers is low because the school has put its resources primarily into keeping that student load low. There are three divisions that roughly correspond to grades 7 and 8 (Division 1), grades 9 and 10 (Division 2), and grades 11 and 12 (Division 3). Students are in heterogeneous classes within the division. Students move from one division to the next through a “gateway” process where they demonstrate they have met all of the criteria for excellence in all of the academic areas. The climate and the professional culture of the school reflect a positive, respectful, and reflective environment where learning is paramount.

The support services for students are outstanding. Again, the school has been deliberate about figuring out what students need and providing for those needs. The counseling staff works very closely with the school nurse to stay on top of student issues. All of the student support services work closely together, yet each person has a specified expertise (personal counseling, college counseling, nurse, special education, etc.) These staff members are thoughtful about how they communicate with parents and other staff members about student issues, being especially careful about issues of confidentiality.

Although the library has a sizable collection of resources available, these resources are not being used as effectively as they should be. Teachers generally do not work with the librarian in developing curriculum but do their own work in identifying resources and teaching resource skills. The librarian is part-time, with a part-time support person as well. Even with this staffing, there are times during the week when there is no one assisting in the library. This is a resource area that is underutilized by the staff and students.

Parker School does an outstanding job in communicating with parents and encouraging their participation in the school. Because students are drawn from so many communities, it has been more difficult to build the relationships with the business and outside community. However, the Parker Teachers Center is an excellent example of how the school is collaborating with other educators across the state and the country. The Teachers Center has a variety of programs including an alternative certification program and various seminars available to teachers and prospective teachers.

Over the life of the school, Parker has figured out how to do the budgeting necessary to keep a charter school going. At this point, it has accumulated a significant surplus that will be available for a future “rainy day.” It has secured a building through a lease. The lease arrangement is not perfect because it is difficult to make long-term investments in the building without a clearer sense of how long the school will be there. Because the school is a former elementary school, the facilities (particularly for science labs) are not

adequate for some of the programs. Over the next few years, the board of trustees will be looking into the long-term financial and space needs of the school.

FRANCIS W. PARKER CHARTER ESSENTIAL SCHOOL SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY PROFILE (as of summer 2001)

The Francis W. Parker Charter Essential School in Devens, Massachusetts was founded by parents and teachers and received its initial charter in 1995. In 1999, the Commonwealth renewed the school's charter for another five years (2000-2005). Parker was one of the first Massachusetts Commonwealth Charter Schools. The school was founded on the basis of the Ten Common Principles of the Coalition of Essential Schools as a community of students, parents, and teachers, with an intentional focus on inquiry as a means to deep learning and an insistence on demonstration as the primary mode of assessment and promotion so that students may learn to use their minds well. Further, Parker School places high value on relationships between and among students, teachers, and parents as well as creating conditions so that each student knows and is known well by teachers and peers.

Parker is a secondary school that serves students who are in grades 7-12 in regular schools. The school opened in 1995 with 120 7th and 8th graders and has added approximately 60-75 students per year until it grew to its present size, which the board of trustees has mandated to be a maximum of 360 students. Enrollment in the school is voluntary and, as mandated by charter school law, if there are more applicants than openings, enrollment is determined by lottery. Priority is given to siblings of enrolled students. Usually there are 250 to 270 applicants for 60-75 positions each year.

Currently, students reside in approximately 40 communities located predominantly near Massachusetts Route 2 and Interstate Highway 495 (see Appendix A for a list and a map of the communities). Students and their families drive and carpool; the school itself provides no transportation to and from school. The average dropout rate for the entire 7-12 student population has been less than 1 percent for the past two years; 7.5 percent of Parker students leave Parker each year to enroll in other schools.

The 2000-01 attendance rate of students was 92.4 percent; the 2000-01 attendance rate for teachers, excluding professional days, was 98.4 percent.

Parker School has graduated two classes to date: The Class of 2000 (33 graduates) and the Class of 2001 (47 graduates). All graduates have been accepted by one or more two- or four-year colleges.

Nearby educational opportunities for Parker students include those of the Greater Boston and Worcester areas, the University of Massachusetts at Lowell, Fitchburg State College, and Mt. Wachusett Community College in Gardner, as well as local art and historical museums.

Parker School students progress through three divisions, the curricular standards of which are comparable to those of middle school (Division 1), foundation-level high school work (Division 2), and advanced work aimed toward graduation transition (Division 3).

Divisions 1 and 2 comprise multi-year curricular cycles, and students of mixed ages are grouped together for the entire cycle. Division 3 comprises a set of discrete courses from which students may choose, based on their interests and plans for the future. Parker standards and processes for promotion from Divisions 1 and 2 and for graduation from Division 3 appear in the Curriculum Standard Essay (NEASC Standard Two).

Among many other such honors, Parker students were recently recognized during 2000-01 for their outstanding achievements in the following selected samples of work in both academic and non-academic areas:

- Honorable Mention in the New England High School Video Competition for a video produced as part of a senior project – The video, entitled “Senior: 2001” won in the “information over 3:00” category. This was a large competition, with hundreds of entries. The student won a certificate of achievement and a cash award for her work. In addition, her video was broadcast locally on Community Television.
- A student was awarded an AFS scholarship to study in Germany.
- A student-artist was invited to show his work in Art All State in the spring of 2001.
- Based on his exceptional performance on the American Invitational Math Exams, a Division Three student qualified with only 250 other students in the country to take the United States Math Olympiad exams in the spring of 2001.
- The Mock Trial team excelled throughout the competition in the regional finals and state championship rounds to go all the way to the Final Trial in the Commonwealth. More than one hundred mock trial teams competed this year. Although Parker lost to Newton North in the final round, the team’s second place finish was its best effort to date.
- Two different Destination Imagination Teams composed of Parker students were honored in regional competition this winter. Awards for outstanding creativity and performance were given to one team; another team advanced to the state tournament.
- Two students represented Parker in their bid for acceptance into the Massachusetts Music Educators Association musical groups. One was awarded the highest score out of 196 sopranos who auditioned and was invited to participate in the district concert in the winter.

Via quarterly progress reports, narrative mid-year and year-end assessments, and Gateway and Graduation Portfolios and Exhibitions teachers evaluate students on several levels. Parker students also take standardized assessments, such as the MCAS, Stanford 9s, PSAT, and SAT tests.

Parker School is located in Devens, Massachusetts in the north-central region of the Commonwealth. Devens is the former U. S. Army’s Fort Devens. Mass Development is the public agency empowered to act as the local redevelopment authority for the former military post. In addition, Mass Development serves as the landlord and municipal services entity for those who own or lease property in Devens.

Local business and industry is varied and rapidly growing in Devens. Distribution and trucking, light manufacturing, and high technology research and production companies are expanding in this growing community. There are few retail businesses at this time except for conference and hotel facilities. While the Parker School is located in Devens, the Devens community itself is not yet a current source of students for Parker. At present, few families actually live in Devens. Those who do are being served by surrounding school districts and are eligible to apply for enrollment at Parker. Also, MassDevelopment has recently entered into an agreement with the Shirley Massachusetts School District to provide free and appropriate public education for Devens children.

As a regional charter school, Parker serves 66 communities that make up the region. These communities are socially and economically diverse, but with a few significant exceptions, are racially, culturally, and ethnically similar. The exceptions are the communities of Ayer, Fitchburg, Lowell, Leominster and Worcester, each of which has significant African-American, Hispanic, and/or Asian/Pacific Islander populations. No single, identifiable minority group represents more than 2 percent of the Parker School population. Out of a maximum of 354 students who were enrolled in the 2000-01 school year, five were African-American, four were Hispanic, and five were of Asian/Pacific Islander heritage; the remaining students are a socially and economically diverse caucasian population. The unemployment rate in the area is approximately the same as the average Massachusetts unemployment rate of 3.4% for the year 2000. Health Services personnel identified 12 students who were eligible for the Children's Medical Security Plan or MassHealth by meeting low-income requirements for these programs.

The Commonwealth's average K-12 expenditure per pupil was \$7,189 for FY00; figures for FY01 are not yet available. Parker's average annual per pupil tuition received from the state was \$6,405 for FY00 and \$6,889 for FY01. Funding for charter schools in Massachusetts emanates from the state and is based generally on the per pupil expenditure in the school district in which each student resides. The above figures do not include entitlement or competitive grant funds. Thus, as a Commonwealth Charter School, Parker's average per pupil revenue varies from year to year, depending on the school district in which its pupils reside and other factors.

The information that was gathered from the NEASC Self-Study Survey has been reviewed. In preparation for the work of the Standards Committees and for the panel presentation to the visiting committee in September 2002, the school community has used this survey to identify and mark for preservation the following strengths of the school: teachers require students to engage in a curriculum that emphasizes depth over breadth and focuses on inquiry, and they foster learning that requires students be engaged in authentic application of curriculum material. In addition, students are required to develop portfolios that document and provide evidence of their learning and serve as a basis for promotion. (survey results, pp 5-8, pp 14-15)

The survey results for all items were in the positive range; i.e., no area was designated below the median. However, the survey suggests that the following areas are important

for the school's growth: more resources for books, supplies, and equipment for the curriculum; adequate and well-maintained equipment that is replaced when necessary; up-to-date library equipment and materials; increased diversity within the staff and student body; and well-maintained school building and grounds (survey results, pp 5-8). Also, the survey results identify the enhancement of science laboratories and technology infrastructure as critical needs for the school. Finally, the school must secure adequate, long-term funding to support the low student-teacher ratio (12:1) which the school believes is essential for its mission and sustainability.

Francis W. Parker Charter Essential School Mission Statement

1. The school should focus on helping adolescents learn to use their minds well. Schools should not attempt to be “comprehensive” if such a claim is made at the expense of the school’s central intellectual purpose.
2. The school’s goals should be simple: that each student master a limited number of essential skills and areas of knowledge. While these skills and areas will, to varying degrees, reflect the traditional academic disciplines, the program’s design should be shaped by the intellectual and imaginative powers and competencies that students need, rather than necessarily by “subjects” as conventionally defined. The aphorism “Less Is More” should dominate: curricular decisions should be guided by the aim of thorough student mastery and achievement rather than by an effort merely to cover content.
3. The school’s goals should apply to all students, while the means to these goals will vary as those students themselves vary. School practice should be tailor-made to meet the needs of every group or class of adolescents.
4. Teaching and learning should be personalized to the maximum feasible extent. Efforts should be directed toward a goal that no teacher have direct responsibility for more than 80 students. To capitalize on this personalization, decisions about the details of the course of study, the use of students’ and teachers’ time and the choice of teaching materials and specific pedagogies must be unreservedly placed in the hands of the principal and staff.
5. The governing practical metaphor of the school should be student-as-worker rather than the more familiar metaphor of teacher-as-deliverer-of-instructional-services. Accordingly, a prominent pedagogy will be coaching, to provoke students to learn how to learn and thus to teach themselves.
6. Students entering secondary school studies are those who can show competence in language and elementary mathematics. Students of traditional high school age but not yet at appropriate levels of competence to enter secondary school studies will be provided intensive remedial work to assist them quickly to meet these standards. The diploma should be awarded upon a successful final demonstration of mastery for graduation-an “Exhibition.” This Exhibition by the student of his or her grasp of the central skills and knowledge of the school’s program may be jointly administered by the faculty and by higher authorities. As the diploma is awarded when earned, the school’s program proceeds with no strict age grading and with no system of “credits earned” by “time spent” in class. The emphasis is on the students’ demonstration that they can do important things.
7. The tone of the school should explicitly and self-consciously stress values of unanxious expectation (“I won’t threaten you but I expect much of you”), of trust (until abused) and of decency (the values of fairness, generosity and tolerance). Incentives appropriate to the school’s particular students and teachers should be emphasized, and parents should be treated as essential collaborators.
8. The principal and teachers should perceive themselves as generalists first (teachers and scholars in general education) and specialists second (experts in but one particular discipline). Staff should expect multiple obligations (teacher-counselor-manager) and a sense of commitment to the entire school.

9. Ultimate administrative and budget targets should include, in addition to total student loads per teacher of eighty or fewer pupils, substantial time for collective planning by teachers, competitive salaries for staff and an ultimate per pupil cost not to exceed that at traditional schools by more than 10 percent. To accomplish this, administrative plans may have to show the phased reduction or elimination of some services now provided students in many traditional comprehensive secondary schools.
10. The school should demonstrate non-discriminatory and inclusive policies, practices, and pedagogies. It should model democratic practices that involve all who are directly affected by the school. The school should honor diversity and build on the strengths of its communities, deliberately and explicitly challenging all forms of inequity and discrimination.

The mission of the Parker School is stated as the Ten Common Principles of the Coalition of Essential Schools.

COMMISSION ON PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS

TEACHING AND LEARNING STANDARDS

MISSION AND EXPECTATIONS FOR STUDENT LEARNING

CURRICULUM

INSTRUCTION

ASSESSMENT

1

TEACHING AND LEARNING STANDARD

Mission and Expectations for Student Learning

The school's mission statement describes the essence of what the school as a community of learners is seeking to achieve. The expectations for student learning are based on and drawn from the school's mission statement. These expectations are the fundamental goals by which the school continually assesses the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process. Every component of the school community must focus on enabling all students to achieve the school's expectations for student learning.

1. The school's mission statement shall represent the school community's fundamental values and beliefs about student learning and the purpose of the school and be consistent with the district's mission statement.
2. The school shall have established expectations for student learning that:
 - reflect the school's mission statement;
 - identify high expectations for all students in academic, civic, and social areas;
 - specifically state what all students should know and be able to do by the time they graduate from the school taking into account the skills, competencies, concepts, and understandings identified by district, state, and national standards and by professional organizations.
3. The mission statement and expectations for student learning shall be developed by the school community and approved and supported by the faculty, the school board, and any other school-wide governing organization.
4. The school shall utilize a variety of data to regularly review the mission statement and expectations for student learning to assure that they reflect students' needs, community expectations, the district mission, and state standards.
5. There shall be a separate document developed by the faculty that defines the school's academic expectations for student learning in specific, measurable ways, describes specific levels of performance, and indicates which level is the indicator of successful accomplishment.
6. The mission statement and expectations for student learning shall guide the procedures, policies, and decisions of the school and shall be evident in the culture of the school.

Conclusions

Parker Charter School lives its mission statement. The Ten Common Principles of the Coalition of Essential Schools direct the intellectual pursuit of “helping adolescents learn to use their minds well.” Programs, policies, and daily practices underscore the core values and beliefs that “place students at the center of the learning experience.” Parker defines its learning community as an essential triad of staff, students, and parents. There is strong evidence of the reciprocal flow of communication among all members of this learning community. (students, staff, parents)

Students understand the school’s rigorous academic expectations. *The Criteria for Excellence* outlines the standards of competencies in reading, writing, research, oral presentation, artistic expression, listening, scientific investigation, mathematical problem-solving, mathematical communication, Spanish, technology, systems thinking, and wellness. Assessment strategies are designed to measure students’ progress in meeting learning expectations. The common language of assessment across all disciplines and divisions supports the mastery of essential skills and knowledge; an environment of “un anxious expectations” enhances the essential building blocks of the process. A philosophy of “less is more” governs the deliberate decision to focus on depth of knowledge rather than a breadth of content. The consistency of assessment strategies allows students to measure their progress and provides them with specific recommendations for improving their work to meet learning expectations. The school addresses behavioral norms for students. (self-study, students, review of documents)

The Parker community documents, recognizes, and celebrates the mastery of habits of learning. Students prepare extensive portfolios of their work. They prepare for Gateway Exhibitions as they pass from one academic division to another. Students participate in democratic decision-making in the school through their community congress and the justice committee. Parker students are encouraged to express their concerns about their academic community. (principal, students, portfolios)

The Parker School Mission Statement was developed by the school’s founding members. A majority of the founders continues to serve as members of the board of trustees. A variety of stakeholders consistently reviews the mission statement, *Habits of Learning*, and *Criteria for Excellence*. The school utilizes data from family surveys, state testing results, and student assessments to assure that these guiding documents reflect student needs and community expectations. In addition, students study the Ten Common Principles, rewriting them in their own words. (principal, parents, annual report)

Personalization of teaching and learning serves as a cornerstone of Parker’s mission statement. The school’s guiding documents lead students to deepen their understanding of complex ideas, to work with more autonomy and initiative, to form connections in their learning, and to serve as active citizens. These expectations are fostered by the strong relationships between students and teachers. Students look to their teachers as adult mentors whose role is to coach student learning and to celebrate student mastery of a limited number of essential skills and areas of knowledge. When work is done well at Parker, the reward is more work, higher expectations, and more autonomy in the design

of the work. This autonomy is highly valued; one student expressed this as the “pinnacle of the Parker experience.” Students feel challenged and nurtured in this school. One young woman summarized her peer’s comments that the Parker School taught them how to learn and how to reflect on their learning. In speaking of her growing confidence, she said, “I’m not scared of myself anymore. Parker gave me my voice, and now I never shut up!” A group of parents attending a recent forum confirmed this sentiment; they clearly embrace the values of trust and respect between their children’s teachers and their children. (students, parents, interviews)

The school’s strong, positive culture, clearly evident to visitors, is a product of a visionary mission statement that drives all procedures, policies, and decisions. The school’s mission pervades conversations with staff, parents, and students within the Parker community. The Parker Charter School firmly places students at the center of their educational experience. (parents, students, observations)

Commendations

1. The presence of the mission statement in every conversation and classroom in the school
2. The congruence of the mission statement, the *Criteria for Excellence, Habits of Learning*, student portfolios, and Gateway Exhibitions
3. The exemplary spirit of reflection that characterizes the Parker community
4. The focus on mastery of a limited number of skills and content areas as stated in the Ten Common Principles of the Coalition of Essential Schools
5. The support for the individual learning needs of students
6. Community norms that engage students in democratic decision-making

Recommendations

1. Identify explicit behavioral expectations for all students by working with the community congress and justice committee.

2

TEACHING AND LEARNING STANDARD

Curriculum

The curriculum, which includes coursework, co-curricular activities, and other educational experiences as described in the program of studies, is the school's formal plan to fulfill its mission statement and expectations for student learning. The curriculum links what the school believes and expects students to learn to its instructional practices. The strength of that link is dependent upon staff commitment to and involvement in a dynamic process of review, evaluation, and revision of the curriculum based on the school's expectations for student learning.

1. From the document that defines the school's academic expectations, each curriculum area shall identify those expectations for student learning for which it is responsible and shall have clearly articulated learning standards in support of such expectations.
2. Written curriculum documents shall be aligned with the school's expectations for student learning and shall guide content, instruction, and assessment.
3. The curriculum plan shall ensure that all students have sufficient opportunity to practice and achieve each of the school's academic expectations for student learning.
4. The content of the curriculum shall be intellectually rigorous and provide opportunities for the authentic application of knowledge and skills.
5. The curriculum shall be appropriately integrated and shall emphasize depth of understanding over breadth of coverage.
6. The school shall provide opportunities to extend student learning beyond the normal course offerings and the school campus.
7. There shall be effective curricular coordination and articulation between and among all academic areas within the school as well as with sending schools in the district to insure the expectations for student learning are being addressed.
8. Instructional materials, technology, equipment and supplies, and staffing shall be sufficient to allow for the implementation of the curriculum.
9. There shall be ongoing review and evaluation of the curriculum that takes into account the assessments of student performance in achieving the school's academic expectations for student learning.
10. The school shall commit sufficient time, financial resources, and personnel to the review and evaluation of curriculum.
11. The professional staff shall be actively involved in the development and revision of the curriculum.
12. Professional development activities shall support the development and implementation of the curriculum.

Conclusions

The Parker School's curriculum clearly identifies the school's academic expectations through the Ten Common Principles of the Coalition of Essential Schools, the *Parker Criteria for Excellence*, and the *Habits of Learning*. Thirteen standards (reading, writing, oral presentation, listening, artistic expression, Spanish, mathematical problem-solving, mathematical communication, scientific investigation, systems thinking, wellness, and technology, and research) articulate the *Criteria for Excellence* expected of students. Each of the four domains (Math, Science and Technology; Arts and Humanities; Wellness; Spanish) addresses standards that apply within its curriculum, and written curriculum materials are available by domain in each division. Curriculum documents are not presented for every Division 3 elective. The *Criteria for Excellence* and the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks are used in the development of curriculum. As curriculum is developed in each domain, the teachers use these documents for all curricular decisions. (self-study, teachers, curriculum guides)

The link between the essential skills, content standards, and the curriculum is well established. Teachers describe beginning their curriculum development by identifying standards they want students to meet in a given unit. Lessons and assessments within each unit flow from these standards and the "Essential Question" for that academic year. While there is evidence that essential skills are being addressed, in some areas there is inconsistency around the stating of content standards. Though there is flow of the curriculum between divisions in each domain, the progression is presented differently in the different domains and divisions. (teachers, student work, curriculum guides, self-study)

Students have multiple opportunities to practice and achieve the school's academic expectations. Teachers design curriculum units so that students work to attain the essential skills at multiple points within and across domains and divisions. Students report that teachers make themselves available for individualized assistance while teachers describe curricular modifications made for students in need of more support or more challenge. The process of revising assignments, a true priority at Parker, also fosters more opportunities for students to meet and exceed academic expectations. Consequently, students recognize the idea that in any assignment there is room for improvement. Students and parents agree that the overall curriculum meets the skills that students need to master. Some students and parents feel that more opportunities would be desirable in mathematics and science. (teachers, parents, survey information)

The curriculum provides challenging learning experiences that require all students to think critically and apply knowledge related to real world situations. Heterogeneous grouping ensures that all students engage in a rigorous academic program. A majority of students and all teachers agree with the statement that courses at Parker require "the real-life application of skills and knowledge." Units culminate in assignments and assessments (e.g. portfolios, oral presentations, political lobbying, performance, symbolic representations, models, poems/stories/plays) that give student work value and significance outside the classroom. In Division 3, completion of an extensive senior project is a graduation requirement. For many seniors, project work is guided by

internships completed outside the school building. (survey information, self-study, student work, curriculum guides)

One of the Essential Schools ten principles values depth over breadth of subject coverage, and the Parker curriculum adheres well to this guideline. Year-long courses are generally divided into 4-6 units that allow students extensive inquiry into specific topics over long periods of time. There is widespread affirmation from all constituencies that the courses have a “less is more” approach. There are many opportunities for interdisciplinary study as a result of the domain structure that integrates math and science with technology, and arts with humanities. (survey information, self-study, teachers)

The school provides a variety of enriching experiences that extend learning outside of the classroom and off school grounds. In advisory, students complete valuable community service projects. Seniors complete senior projects that often include an off-site internship. Students of all ages participate in one to three-day field trips with academic, social, and civic objectives. The school provides a wide variety of athletic and intellectual offerings during and after the normal school day. Teachers and parents agree that the school offers learning opportunities beyond the classroom. (survey information, self-study, teachers)

There is effective curricular coordination and articulation among academic areas. For Arts and Humanities and Math, Science and Technology, in particular, the organization of the domains assures this. Each division coordinates and articulates effectively through the use of the essential question and/or the theme for the year. Teachers are constantly revising lessons and curriculum in order to ensure that the expectations of student learning are being met. The student body of Parker Charter School lives in more than 40 different towns, making coordination of curriculum with sending schools virtually impossible. (teachers, students)

Teachers have adequate materials, technology, and supplies to implement the current curriculum. All students have access to necessary equipment, and class instruction is designed to make effective use of available materials. Although there is not an abundance of materials and supplies, students’ learning and the expectations of students are not significantly impacted. However, faculty members, parents, and students feel strongly that there is a need for more adequate resources, particularly in science classes, to meet every learning need of the school community (self-study, teachers, students).

Three weeks before the school year begins for students, curriculum is reviewed and/or established by the teachers within each domain and division. Curriculum is reviewed and altered throughout the year, both by the performance on assessments, and the observed needs of students. In the past, there has been an “oral tradition” in which the previous teachers of a course act as a key component in the continuity of and development of curriculum. Teachers no longer rely as much on conveying the curriculum in this manner, but have created curriculum binders with the unit overviews, assessments, curriculum and the rubrics. MCAS and other standardized exams do not control the curriculum, but they are used to locate areas in which students perform below expectations so that changes can be made to ensure improvement. The curricular skills for each domain are consistently reviewed to align with the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. Because the

frameworks are extensive, it is impossible to expect a school that values depth over breadth to address all of the frameworks. Parker School has identified what they view as important in meeting these frameworks. (teachers, curriculum committee, panel discussion)

The school invests time each summer to develop curriculum, and teachers work to fine-tune it through collaboration and evaluation of student assessments. The school leadership requires staff members to gather input from students, parents, and other teachers from their domain and/or division in order to continually improve curriculum, align it with the standards, and adjust it to the learning needs of their students. Throughout the year, teachers evaluate curriculum as it is implemented in the classroom by assessing the performance of their students. There is a concern among faculty members about the availability of financial resources to support the curriculum. (principal, teachers, parents, self-study)

The staff is responsible for the development and revision of curriculum. Each teacher develops the course curriculum before the school year using documents, past experiences, and the input of past teachers of the course. Students and parents are invited to participate in these summer curriculum tuning sessions, as well as at community forums, in order to elicit their input on the school's curriculum. Teachers devote eight hours a week to individual work, team planning, and alignment of divisions and domains. This provides the teachers with a true sense of ownership of their courses and allows them to continually adapt the courses and revise the curriculum to meet the needs and expectations of the students. (teachers, curriculum meeting)

Within Parker, professional development regarding curriculum is available to all teachers. Most of these opportunities occur through mentoring, collaboration among teachers, and work within divisions and domains. The majority of professional development occurs at the school itself. Professional development outside of the school seems to be limited to attendance at selected conferences or enrollment in professional associations. (self-study, teachers, professional development folder)

Commendations

1. A rigorous, integrated curriculum emphasizing depth over breadth that is available and accessible to all students
2. Frequent opportunities for independent inquiry by students and teachers
3. The concerted effort on the part of teachers to coordinate across division and domains
4. Extensive articulation of the curriculum and the *Criteria for Excellence* to the students
5. Daily commitment to review and revise curriculum
6. Curriculum decisions that place the student at the center of the educational process
7. A faculty that models reflective practice

8. Visionary leadership that allows teachers to make decisions about curriculum design
9. Extensive amount of time for curriculum development and revision in the summer and through common planning time in the school schedule
10. Significant opportunities for students to apply their skills and knowledge in their learning experiences

Recommendations

1. Delineate how content and skill standards are being addressed within and across divisions and domains
2. Identify, prioritize, and determine how instructional resources can be improved
3. Formulate structures for using assessment information to guide professional development and curriculum design and review

3

TEACHING AND LEARNING STANDARD

Instruction

The quality of instruction in a school is the single most important factor affecting the quality of student learning and is the link between curriculum, learning expectations, and student performance. Instructional practice must be grounded in the school's mission and expectations for student learning, supported by research in best practice, and refined and improved based on identified student needs. Consequently, teachers are expected to be reflective about their instructional practices and participate in professional dialogue with their colleagues about instruction and student learning.

1. Instructional strategies and practices shall be consistent with the school's stated mission and expectations for student learning.
2. Instructional strategies shall include practices that personalize instruction, make connections across disciplines, engage students as active self-directed learners, involve all students in higher order thinking to promote depth of understanding, and provide opportunities to demonstrate the application of knowledge or learning.
3. Teachers shall provide formal and informal opportunities for students to assess their own learning.
4. Teachers shall use feedback from a variety of sources such as other teachers, students, supervisors, and parents as a means of improving instruction.
5. Teachers shall be knowledgeable about current research on effective instructional approaches and reflective about their own practice.
6. Discussion of instructional strategies, practices, and student work shall be a significant part of the professional culture of the school.
7. Adequate time and financial resources shall be committed to ensuring the continuous improvement of instruction.
8. Technology shall be utilized to support instruction and to improve student learning.
9. The school's professional development programs shall provide opportunities for teachers to develop and improve their instructional practices and be guided by identified instructional needs.
10. Teacher supervision and evaluation processes shall be used to improve instruction for the purpose of improving student learning.

Conclusions

The staff members of the Francis W. Parker Charter Essential School consistently use the school's mission and expectations for student learning to guide their instructional practices. Emphasis is placed on the "teacher as coach, student as learner," as well as a philosophy that reflects "less is more." At Parker, students are placed at the center of the learning process. This is accomplished through several different means including, but not limited to, non-traditional classroom seating arrangements, personal learning plans (PLPs), and a self-selected senior project. As a member of the Coalition of Essential Schools, instructional practices are also guided through the Ten Common Principles. For example, teachers encourage students to "use their minds well" through challenges of the week (COWS), internships, and essential questions that guide units of study. High expectations are set for students through the school's *Criteria for Excellence* and the *Habits of Learning*. Although the skills that are itemized in the *Criteria for Excellence* remain consistent for students at each level, the standards that they have to meet as they progress from one "Division" to the next become more complex. (mission statement, teachers, student work)

Learning at the Parker School is highly personalized for the students. According to the NEASC self-study survey, most students (75%) agree that the staff teaches to their learning needs. Instruction is personalized through the Personal Learning Plans developed by students through the cooperation of parents, teachers, and advisors. Advisors also serve as personal mentors to students. Students are encouraged to become active, self-directed learners through a series of scaffolding activities within each of the three divisions that leads to independent learning such as end of the year assessments and senior projects. Higher-order thinking skills are developed through projects and assignments that not only ask students to research a particular individual but also to take on the character of that figure and create a symbolic representation of him/her. Finally, students are provided with a number of opportunities to demonstrate their learning. Events and activities that highlight student work include Gateway Celebrations, Thursday Gatherings, and Exhibition and Senior Project Nights in which students present to an audience of their peers, teachers, and parents as well as members outside of the school community. Consequently, 100 percent of the students surveyed in the NEASC self-study survey indicated that they had opportunities to demonstrate their application of knowledge and skills. (student handbook, teachers, students, self-study survey)

Students are assessed based on the *Criteria for Excellence*, allowing the students to monitor themselves according to exactly what is expected. For instance, a writing piece for an Arts and Humanities class (AH) consists of several drafts that have been edited by the student, his peers, and the instructor. Drafts are passed in, and the final product and the drafts are added to the student's portfolio. In addition, teachers allow students to revise much of their work in order to bring it to the standard set by the division. For example, students have the opportunity to use the feedback that they receive from a Division 1 teacher to revise their work at least once so that they can meet expectations. Another type of self-study opportunity comes in the student's portfolio. Students complete a cover sheet that asks them to reflect on their work. Finally, students are provided with several opportunities to assess the work of their peers. For example,

students in Spanish classes often participate in peer-editing activities. Students also provide each other with “warm” and “cool” feedback on creative writing pieces such as poems and plays in order to improve a piece. As a result of their participation in these activities, nearly 80 percent of the students surveyed in the NEASC self-study survey agreed that their teachers provide them with opportunities to assess their own learning. (student work, teachers, students, observation, self-study survey)

It is clear that a culture of reflection exists at Parker. Teachers receive feedback from a variety of sources, both inside and outside of the school walls. Because teachers often work in pairs, they are able to provide one another with immediate feedback about what is working and what needs to be modified for the students during a lesson. Further, each domain (i.e. Math, Science and Technology or Arts and Humanities) has a leader who provides feedback to the teachers through both formal and informal observations. All teachers also solicit feedback from the students. In fact, 73.5 percent of the students and 72.6 percent of parents surveyed indicated in the NEASC self-study survey that they believe that teachers use the feedback that they provide to improve the quality of instruction. Finally, parents provide teachers with additional feedback through parent forums, surveys, and the PLP process. (teachers, parents, self-study survey, support materials)

The professionalism of the Parker School staff permeates the building. Each teacher is conversant with the Ten Common Principles outlined by the Coalition of Essential Schools, an organization dedicated to secondary school reform to improve student learning. In addition, staff members often conduct workshops for their colleagues that allow others to benefit from their unique areas of expertise. One social studies teacher who was interviewed explained how he has benefited from collaboration with a peer who has a strong knowledge of art. Consequently, this has made its way into his instruction of his Arts and Humanities class. In-house professional development activities such as Critical Friends Groups (CFGs) encourage all teachers to reflect on and engage in professional conversation about their own practice. Finally, the presence of the Parker Teachers Center expands the role of teaching and learning for the Parker staff. (teachers, student work, self-study)

Giving and receiving feedback plays a significant role in the school’s culture. Teachers meet on a daily basis to discuss how teaching and learning strategies can be consistently implemented throughout each of the disciplines. Teachers meet informally during the school day to discuss teaching and learning, and formal meetings are held after the students have left the building to address curricular concerns and to share best practices. Critical Friends Groups (CFGs) allow teachers to continuously assess their own teaching methods and to ensure that their students are engaged, challenged, focused, and directed. During this time, the teachers share techniques that either did or did not work, and attempt to devise a better way of demonstrating an application. Teachers also use their time together to “tune” their work and utilize protocols for examining student work and teacher practice. (teachers, school leadership team, self-study, observation)

Time and funding are provided for staff members to improve their instructional practices. There are two hours built into the school day for the teachers to create lesson plans,

examine student work, and share best practices. While time is available, funding is limited. Only 42.4 percent of the teachers indicated in the NEASC self-study survey that “adequate” funds are devoted to the continuous improvement of instruction. Class sets of textbooks and other resources are purchased for students, and these are stored in the teachers’ rooms. Although textbooks are used largely as an instructional resource, students mention that the condition of these texts is poor in both math and science classes, citing pages that are ripped or missing. All teachers are allotted \$200 for professional development, but they seldom leave campus to collaborate with professionals in their content area. Almost all of the training that the teachers do is on site and with their peers. Finally, although teachers’ salaries are competitive for the school’s geographical area, the contract year is three weeks longer than most schools, allowing for summer curriculum planning. (self-study survey, teachers, students, observations)

Currently, there are eighty computer workstations in Parker School, and an additional fifteen have just been purchased. Technology is available to all students and staff members in the Math, Science, and Technology domain, the Arts and Humanities domain, and the Wellness and Spanish domains. Software is available in the science classes, and graphing calculators are made available for students who cannot purchase their own. All students have the ability to use technology for their projects. Division 1 Arts and Humanities uses the word processing software and the Internet for research projects, and PowerPoint is used for presentations. Division 2 uses Tessel Mania and Geometry Sketch Pad for geometry classes to allow the student to see Three-D images of geometric figures on the screen, giving them a more thorough picture. Division 2 also uses Excel for correlation coefficients. Students feed collected data into the Excel program in order to create correlation coefficients. Division 3 has two programming courses in which the student’s final project is to write a software program. The majority of parents (72%) and staff members (58%) indicated in the NEASC self-study survey that technology is utilized as an instructional tool to support learning. (building tour, teachers, self-study survey, observations, student interviews)

The teachers at Parker School are provided with a number of opportunities and some financial resources for professional development. Time is allocated to meet with peers within their discipline, as well as those who are instructors in other domains. Each teacher has a two-hour block to plan and discuss practices and student work with his/her colleagues. They also meet daily at the close of school to discuss concerns and future plans. For workshops held outside of the school building, each staff member is budgeted two hundred dollars to apply toward workshop fees. In addition, the school pays for some staff members to travel each year to the Coalition of Essential Schools Annual Fall Forum. Coverage is sometimes available for teachers who attend conferences and workshops; however, accommodations are usually made among staff members. Although professional growth opportunities are available, several teachers have expressed the desire to seek out professional development opportunities outside the school. (teachers, school schedule, self-study)

The primary responsibility of supervision of the professional staff at Parker is conducted through some of the members of the school’s leadership team. Domain leaders in both

Arts and Humanities and in Math, Science and Technology evaluate the instructors formally according to the criteria that are outlined in a newly developed teacher evaluation document. Teachers are also evaluated informally through several means. In addition to formal observations, domain leaders often conduct “walk throughs” in which they view an instructor’s classroom for a few minutes. Instructors have stated that another important source of information about their instructional practices comes from their peers through activities such as CFGs. Teaching partners provide instructors with immediate feedback about what is and is not working for students in a lesson. Adjustments are quickly made based on the observations of these peers. In addition, teachers within the same domains are encouraged to observe and learn from one another so that they may improve the overall quality of student learning. (teacher evaluation document, teachers, school leadership team)

Commendations

1. Instruction is tied closely to the school’s mission as well as its expectations for student learning
2. Teachers use a wide variety of instructional techniques to ensure the success of all students
3. Time is built into the school schedule and program for the improvement of instructional practices
4. The revision process enables students to rework their materials and places an emphasis on process over product
5. Teachers assess students in a variety of ways
6. Reflection is a part of the everyday culture for teachers and students at Parker.
7. Technology is effectively used to support instruction in all divisions and across all domains
8. The culture of the Parker community enables teachers to offer suggestions and make recommendations to their peers concerning instructional techniques and strategies

Recommendations

1. Provide teachers with more opportunities and financial resources for professional development outside of the school walls

4

TEACHING AND LEARNING STANDARD

Assessment of Student Learning

Assessment is an integral part of the teaching and learning process. Its purpose is to inform students regarding their learning progress and teachers regarding ways to adjust their instruction to better respond to the learning needs of students. Further, it communicates the growth and competence of students to parents, school officials, and the public. The results of student learning must be continually discussed and used to develop short-term and long-term strategies for improving curriculum and instruction.

1. Teachers shall base their classroom assessment procedures on clearly stated expectations for student learning.
2. Specific learning criteria based on specific expectations for student learning shall be the basis for grading and reporting.
3. Teachers shall use a variety and range of classroom assessment strategies to determine student knowledge, skills, and competencies and to assess student growth over time.
4. Teachers shall use the results of classroom assessment of student learning to evaluate and revise the curriculum.
5. Teachers shall use the results of classroom assessment of student learning to improve their instructional practices.
6. Teachers shall meet to discuss and share student work and the results of classroom assessment for the purpose of revising the curriculum and instructional strategies.
7. Teachers shall communicate to students and their families how student work and progress are being assessed.
8. The school's professional development programs shall provide opportunities for teachers to develop a broad range of assessment strategies for classroom use.
9. The administration and faculty shall use agreed upon levels of performance, indicators of successful accomplishment, and other data to assess the progress of students in achieving the school's stated academic expectations for student learning and regularly report the findings to the public.
10. The administration and faculty shall use assessment data to determine student success in meeting the school's stated civic and social expectations and regularly report the findings to the public.

Conclusions

At the Parker Charter Essential School, all teachers base their classroom assessment procedures on clearly stated expectations for student learning. Classroom and corridor walls display the comprehensive *Criteria for Excellence* to which the entire school adheres. These standards are also available on the web and on information sent to parents and prospective students. Rubrics are distributed extensively for assignments and always distributed for assignments that are eligible for the portfolio. These rubrics form the basis for a reporting system in which students are assessed in terms of how they are reaching the standards using “Just Beginning, Approaches, Meets, or Exceeds”. A very high percentage of students report that they clearly understand the requirements for assessment. Feedback to students from peers, community members, and teachers reflects strengths and weaknesses and aids the student in the revision process. At all divisions, samples of portfolios provide more than ample evidence that scoring rubrics are used to assess student work. (survey, portfolios, teachers, students)

All teachers use a variety and range of classroom assessment strategies. Evidence of various types of assessments are found in student portfolios such as oral reports, plays, lab reports, and demonstrations. Review of student portfolios clearly illustrates the use of peer editing and revision after assessment. Portfolios are also used to determine student knowledge, skills, and competencies and to assess student growth over time. Teachers also assess student understanding with short quizzes after specific skills are taught. Student work shows exceptional creativity, depth of knowledge, and a wide variety of skills. (student shadowing, portfolios, self-study)

Teachers use the results of classroom assessment of student learning to evaluate and revise the curriculum. Teachers report in their self-study that in the past two years existing curriculum has been revised in several areas based on data from assessment of student learning. Prior to this, much of the school’s curriculum was developed anew each year. Therefore, opportunities to revise curriculum based upon assessment were rare. The math curriculum continues to be revised and designed based on student performance on the MCAS and community feedback. (self-study, teachers, support material)

Teachers use the results of classroom assessment of student learning to improve their instructional practices. They meet regularly to discuss and share student work. During these meetings, the results of classroom assessment across teaching teams (as well as within these teams) are used for the purpose of revising the curriculum and instructional strategies. All teachers participate in Critical Friends Groups as a monthly professional development opportunity. These meetings allow for peer critiquing and improvement of instruction. Typically, each teacher annually brings at least one piece of work for critiquing to a session. The master schedule indicates that teachers have an ample amount of common planning time to meet daily with teachers of similar subjects. It was observed that teachers meet to norm their assessments to ensure common standards and language for the assessment of student work. Domain meetings (department meetings) and division meetings (grade level) are also scheduled to discuss criteria for student gateways (promotion). (observation, supporting documents, teachers)

Teachers communicate with students and their families regarding how student work and progress are being assessed. Surveys indicate that a student's progress toward meeting the school's expectations is clearly communicated. Assessment workshops are offered for new students and their parents in the fall. Sample portfolios contain extensive evidence of feedback on progress. Teachers, students, and parents report that one of the methods used for assessing student progress toward meeting a range of goals involves creating a personal learning plan (PLP) with the collaboration of the student, his/her parents, and advisor. Teachers have access to the information contained in the PLP. Quarterly progress reports to the parents may contain information concerning the student's attainment of his goals. A significant number of families do not believe PLPs are as effective as they could be. Teachers report that PLPs are not used consistently in classrooms for individual assessment. Despite the concern over the effectiveness of the PLPs, collaboration between parent, child, and teacher is evident in all parties being satisfied with the Parker assessment methods. (survey, portfolios, teachers, parents, students)

The school's internal professional development programs provide opportunities for teachers to develop a broad range of assessment strategies for classroom use. Professional development within the school and the Coalition of Essential Schools is extremely supportive of developing a broad range of assessment strategies. However, only 56.5% of the teachers agree that the existing professional development programs help them to develop new assessment strategies. Teachers desire more development opportunities beyond those offered internally or within CES. Because a limited amount of money is available to each teacher for professional development and there is a shortage of qualified substitute teachers, when teachers leave the building for professional development, there is a burden on the teaching partners. (survey, teachers assessment subcommittee)

The administration and faculty use agreed upon levels of performance, indicators of successful accomplishment, and other data to assess the progress of students in achieving the school's stated academic expectations for student learning and regularly report the findings to the public. These rigorous expectations are posted throughout the school, on the web, and in printed material. The larger Parker community celebrates the accomplishments of students through Gateway Celebrations and exhibitions of major projects. Each year the school collects and publishes in its annual report the results of the Stanford-9 tests, MCAS tests, number of students who Gateway (progress from one division to another), number of students who fulfill the graduation requirements, and results of the college admissions process. The annual report is published in print and on the Web. (supporting documents, parents, teachers)

The administration and faculty use assessment data to determine student success in meeting the school's stated civic and social expectations and regularly report the findings to the Parker community. Through their advisory, the Parker School students are involved with many service projects. Each advisory is required to document its plans for community service. These activities are publicized in the Friday announcements, Thursday morning meetings, and they are available on the school web site. Progress on student goals in these areas could be reported on the PLP. (teachers, students)

Commendations

1. The well articulated, school-wide *Criteria for Excellence* are posted in all rooms and corridors and drive assessment in the school
2. The well articulated school-wide *Criteria for Excellence* are universally accepted by all constituents of the Parker community
3. Standards are detailed in rubrics tailored to individual assignments
4. Informal assessment of student learning and student needs is supported through the small student/teacher ratio, editing, and advisory
5. The professional culture and school structure support formal and informal discussion of student assessment and curriculum
6. Students, parents and the larger Parker School community are regularly informed of the means used to assess student work
7. Extensive professional development within the school happens regularly for all teachers through the school day
8. Students are frequently given the opportunity to revise their work after assessment to meet the stated goal

Recommendations

1. Utilize assessment data to its full potential in order to improve curriculum.
2. Assess the effectiveness of personal learning plans for student assessment and make appropriate modifications
3. Respond to teacher needs for expanded and varied external professional development

COMMISSION ON PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS

SUPPORT STANDARDS

LEADERSHIP AND ORGANIZATION

SCHOOL RESOURCES FOR LEARNING

COMMUNITY RESOURCES FOR LEARNING

5

SUPPORT STANDARD

Leadership and Organization

The manner in which a school provides leadership, organizes itself, makes decisions, and treats its members profoundly affects teaching and learning. Faculty and administration must be clear and reflective about and responsible for the decisions and practices they have implemented in organizing and structuring their programs and in creating a culture that supports learning for all students.

1. The principal shall provide leadership in the school community by building and maintaining a vision, direction, and focus for student learning.
2. Teachers shall provide leadership essential to the success of school improvement.
3. The school board and superintendent shall ensure that the principal has sufficient autonomy and authority to guide the school in its mission and in meeting the school's stated expectations for student learning.
4. The organization and structure of the educational program shall promote the school's mission and expectations for student learning.
5. Student grouping patterns shall reflect the diversity of the student body, foster heterogeneity, and be consistent with the school's mission and expectations for student learning as well as current educational research.
6. The schedule shall support the school's mission and expectations for student learning and should be designed to provide the most effective implementation of curriculum and instruction.
7. School leaders shall accord meaningful roles in the decision-making process to students, parents, and members of the staff to promote an atmosphere of participation, responsibility, and ownership.
8. Each teacher shall have a student load that enables him/her to provide sufficient attention to the needs of individual students.
9. The school shall provide opportunities for teachers to collaborate within and across departments.
10. All school staff shall be involved in promoting the well-being and learning of students.
11. Student success shall be regularly acknowledged, celebrated, and displayed.
12. The climate of the school shall be positive, respectful, and supportive, resulting in a sense of pride and ownership.

13. The professional culture of the school shall be characterized by thoughtful, reflective, and constructive discourse about student learning and well-being in both formal and informal settings.

Conclusions

The principal of Parker School provides strong leadership in the school community through her collaborative style. She is honest, straightforward, and caring in all of her interactions with students, staff, parents, and the board of trustees. There is a clear and consistent focus on student learning. The principal has been at Parker School since the second year of the school, originally as the head of the arts and humanities domain of the school. She took over as principal one year ago and has been very effective in that role. The principal works with the staff to continue to maintain and enhance the vision of the school. (students, parents, staff members, principal)

Teachers and other staff members are integral to the leadership of the school. There is a great deal expected of staff members when they arrive at Parker School, and they are supported in undertaking leadership roles in the school. Teachers are involved in all aspects of school decisions, including membership on the board of trustees. Teachers work collaboratively with colleagues to develop curriculum, arrange schedules, and create assessments. The dominant decision-making paradigm seems to be to let decisions be made by those most affected by the decision. This means that many people are involved in many decisions, but most importantly those involved have the most say. (self-study, teachers, students)

The Parker School Board of Trustees consists of three pairs of elected representatives (two students with no voting rights, two faculty members and three parents), the principal, and seven other trustees. The seven other trustees include Ted and Nancy Sizer as well as others who were founders of the school. The board of trustees maintains a delicate balance between getting too involved and micromanaging and staying too far back to provide effective leadership. The board stays involved in many decisions of the school but provides autonomy for the principal and staff to operate free of excessive oversight. Every member of the board is committed to the mission of the school, and each member uses the lens of “what is best for students” in making decisions. (principal, board of trustees, self-study materials)

The organization and structure of the educational program are the heart and soul of Parker School. The mission of the school is to move the student to the center of the educational process, and this is done in all academic domains. All of the Ten Common Principles of the Coalition of Essential Schools are evident throughout the school. The teaching and learning is organized in domains (arts and humanities, math, science and technology, Spanish, Wellness). The students move through three divisions starting with the equivalent of seventh grade in Division 1 and moving through the equivalent of twelfth grade in Division 3. Students move from one division to the next by passing “gateway” points in each of the domains. The structure of the school is designed to promote the mission and expectations for student learning. (annual report, self-study materials, Ten Common Principles)

The expectations for student learning apply to every student in the school. Students are grouped based on what division they are working in and at what point in the gateway process they are. Although most of the students spend two years in each division, there

are some who take more or less time to move through a division. Students may go through the gateway process when they are ready. The student/teacher ratio is kept very low so that all students' needs will be met within the classroom. There is no ability grouping of any sort at Parker School. The grouping patterns reflect the mission of the school and are consistent with current educational research. (self-study, annual report, teachers, students, principal)

The Parker School's schedule is simple and functional. By keeping the number of courses offered to a minimum and by defining what they view as essential, the schedule allows for longer blocks of time for instruction, for small class sizes, and ample teacher planning time with colleagues. In addition, the schedule provides time for advisory groups to meet for a brief time at both the beginning and end of the day and one extended period one day per week. The schedule does provide for the most effective implementation of curriculum and instruction. (self-study, staff members, students, website)

Parker School is thoughtful and deliberate in outlining how decisions are made. Students, parents, staff members, and the board of trustees are all involved in different ways in the decision-making process. The school has developed a visual representation that helps everyone to figure out where a particular decision will go. In most cases, decisions are made with input from a variety of constituencies. Students, staff members, and parents all report that they are involved in decision-making and that their input is important. (self-study, parents, students, staff members, annual report)

Parker School has made sacrifices in other areas in order to maintain a student load for teachers that allows for sufficient attention to each student. Most teachers teach in teams of two teachers with two classes of approximately 25 students. This means that each teacher has a student load of about 50 students. However, in many of the teacher teams, responsibility for assessment of students is divided so that each teacher is responsible for the assessment of about 25 students. This allows the students to receive effective and timely feedback for their work. The team teaching approach allows for collaborative planning for curriculum, instruction and assessment. (annual report, self-study, staff members)

In addition to the common planning time during the school day for teaching teams to collaborate, there are many opportunities for teachers to meet with other teachers in their domain as well as in other domains. There is an expectation of collaboration among the professionals in the school. Meetings with teachers from other divisions and domains are not left to chance but come regularly as part of domain meetings and "Critical Friends Groups" (groups of teachers who meet regularly to look at student and teacher work). (self-study, staff members, principal, annual report)

It is clear that all staff members (principal, teachers, counselors, nurse, support staff) are working to ensure that the needs of all students are being met. Everyone in the school is committed to the mission and this is evident in all the words and actions of those who work at the school. (observations, students, staff members, annual report)

Parker School uses a variety of methods to celebrate student success. Each Thursday, one or more students are chosen to display work or perform for the whole school. On “Café Wednesday,” some students perform for an audience of staff, students, and parents. “Night of Stars” is a science event where students’ work is celebrated. When students go through the “gateway” process, students and staff members attend these events and celebrate together. Student work is posted in the classrooms and hallways. (observations, self-study, staff members, students)

The school climate and the professional culture of the school are entwined closely. Students are aware that their teachers are thoughtful and reflective in their practice. Everyone participates in thoughtful, reflective, and constructive conversations about student learning and well-being. There is a great deal of pride in the school’s mission. Teachers, students, and parents are very knowledgeable about the school’s mission, and everyone in the school is living the Ten Common Principles of the Coalition of Essential Schools. (observations, students, staff members, parents, self-study)

Commendations

1. The exceptional school climate that fosters a sense of pride and ownership by all
2. The principal who is an outstanding educational leader and is totally dedicated to and passionate about her students
3. Multiple leadership roles that are taken on by teachers and other staff members
4. Effective collaboration among students, staff members, and parents ensuring that students’ needs are met
5. The autonomy given to teachers to collaboratively develop curriculum and assessments
6. The clearly communicated decision-making process that involves all stakeholders
7. The overwhelming dedication of the board of trustees, particularly the founding trustees of the school
8. The schedule that meets students’ needs and provides for extended collaborative planning time for teachers
9. Critical Friends Groups that provide new teachers with effective mentoring and experienced teachers with thoughtful and constructive feedback for their practice
10. Creative ways to celebrate student learning

Recommendations (none)

6

SUPPORT STANDARD

School Resources for Learning

The school's student support services include guidance and health services, special education, personal, career, and social counseling, and access to outside referrals along with library/information services. Student learning is dependent upon adequate and appropriate support programs and services. The school is responsible for providing an effective range of integrated resources to enhance and improve student learning and to support the school's mission and expectations.

1. The school shall allocate resources, programs, and services so that all students have an equal opportunity to achieve the school's stated academic expectations for student learning and to participate in the educational program.
2. The school shall allocate resources, programs, and services so that all students have an equal opportunity to achieve stated civic and social expectations.
3. Each student shall have an adult member of the school community who serves to personalize that student's educational experience.
4. The school's student support services shall be consistent with the school's mission and expectations for student learning.
5. Student support and library/information services personnel shall be knowledgeable about the curriculum and involved in its implementation, evaluation, and revision.
6. All school resources for learning shall be regularly evaluated and revised to support improved student learning.
7. Student support personnel shall enhance student learning by interacting and working cooperatively with professional and other staff and utilizing community resources to address the academic, social, emotional, and physical needs of students.
8. There shall be a system for effective and ongoing communications with students, parents/guardians, and school personnel designed to keep them informed about the types of available student support services and about identified student needs.
9. The school shall provide and maintain library/information services program and materials that are fully integrated into the school's curriculum and instructional program and are consistent with the school's mission and expectations for student learning.

10. The library/information services program shall foster independent inquiry by enabling students and faculty to utilize various school and community information resources and technologies.
11. A wide range of materials, technology, and other library/information resources shall be available to students and faculty in a variety of formats and utilized to improve teaching and learning and be reflective of the school's student population.
12. Library/information services shall include, but not be limited to, sufficient certified professional personnel.
13. Students, faculty, and support staff shall have regular and frequent access to library/information services facilities and programs as an integral part of their educational experience before, during, and after the school day.
14. Policies shall be in place for the selection and removal of information resources and the use of technologies and the Internet.
15. Student records shall be maintained in a confidential and secure manner consistent with federal and state law.

Conclusions

Parker Charter School exhibits a strong commitment to provide resources, programs, and services to ensure that all students benefit from the school's adherence to the Ten Common Principles. Heterogeneous grouping, low teacher-student ratios, support staffing, the advisory program, and personal learning plans are all elements that indicate the school's strong commitment to meeting the needs of all students. (self-study, annual report, staff members)

Students are grouped heterogeneously in three divisions, and all students complete an annual personal learning plan (PLP). Students meet daily in advisory which serves as a link to the academic, social and service goals of the school. Justice committee and community congress members elected from advisories foster social responsibility and serve the school community. A strong service ethic is evidenced by the more than thirty community service projects undertaken by advisories and the addition of a part time advisory coordinator. The recent addition of a Division 3 mentoring program for Division 1 students provides an in-school service opportunity for upper level students. The special education teacher provides resource room services for students with IEPs and 504 plans, as well as supervising an after school homework program and a directed study to assist Division 1 students with study skills. The small class size and low student load assures that students are well known by faculty and support personnel. (shadowing, parents, self-study)

The Parker School Advisory Program ensures that all students have a meaningful relationship with a faculty member. All faculty members are trained and serve as advisors to groups of twelve students who meet for group discussions twice daily for fifteen minutes at the beginning and end of school and for one hour on Wednesdays. It is clear that the advisory structure fosters the personalization of a student's school experience in the following areas: academic advising and monitoring (yearly PLPs), community service, character and social development, and team building. Eighty percent of the students and 90% of the parents surveyed agreed that at least one adult cares about them. (surveys, observations, manual)

The collaborative team of school services coordinator, nurse/wellness coordinator, special education teachers, and counselors plan and communicate regularly to provide support for students. Consistent with the school's mission to focus on the needs of the student, its integrated approach to provide services is exemplified by each member's participation in divisional teams and involvement with curriculum planning. In addition to implementing a wellness curriculum, the support team works with local agencies including LUK (Let Us Know) and the Massachusetts State Police to provide drug and alcohol education. Students have access to career and college guidance through a transition counselor and on-line assessments. Recent graduates and parents return to the school at the end of their first semester to share with students and parents their reflective thoughts on the Parker experience and their preparedness for life after Parker. (student support services, parents, self study)

Student support staff members participate in curriculum workshops, work on task forces, attend domain and team meetings, and participate on committees. Guidance and health staff members meet every three weeks to collaborate on wellness curriculum and student needs. Although the library information specialist attends curriculum planning and evaluation sessions and Critical Friends Groups, and communicates with faculty and students, her role in curriculum is limited by her part-time position. (self study, teachers)

Resources for learning are regularly evaluated through formal and informal means. Parent, faculty, and student surveys, parent communication, health advisory council services reviews, and special education needs assessment are among the tools used to assess needs. Recent needs analysis has resulted in additional technology resources as well as the addition of a twelve-hour per week library assistant, a half-time special education teacher and additional hours for the nurse/wellness coordinator. (self study, teacher survey, teachers)

Student support personnel employ a well-developed collaborative team approach to address the academic, social, emotional, and physical needs of students. The nurse/wellness coordinator, school services director, transition counselor, guidance counselor, and special needs teachers meet regularly and communicate directly with students and their teachers. The special education teachers act as liaisons to the classroom teachers to ensure that students with IEPs and 504 plans have successful learning experiences. Support personnel work directly with any teacher who needs assistance in making accommodations for students with disabilities. The school counselor meets with students individually or in groups, sponsors the school's Gay Straight Alliance, and with the wellness coordinator, sponsors the peer-mentoring program. The school services director, a certified psychologist, is able to provide in-school services as well as outside referrals for students and families. (student support, self-study, observation, parents/students)

Parker school utilizes a varied and well-established communication triad, that includes parents, students, and faculty. Parents are encouraged to communicate with support services via e-mail. In addition to announcements posted on the school's web site, information is disseminated through weekly Friday announcements and special newsletters. Faculty members regularly communicate through e-mail when information is not confidential. Student support services are clearly explained in the student handbook as well as through mandatory information sessions. Counselors meet with all new students to provide information on services available both in and out of school. Students obtain information in advisories and through the wellness curriculum. Student services personnel as well as the principal provide information sessions for parents through parent forums. (parents, self-study, support services members)

Although the Parker School Library houses an 18,000 volume collection, provides access to 13 computer workstations, and is well arranged and maintained, library and information services are not fully integrated in the school. The library is staffed by a professional librarian, but only on a part-time basis. The library is open throughout the school day, but is not utilized by teachers or students after school because of the lack of staffing. Because students come from so many different towns, it is difficult for the

librarian to coordinate services with local town libraries. Much of the collection was donated so the librarian continues to weed volumes that do not meet curriculum needs. Budgeting for library materials is adequate, but the budgeted amounts have not always been spent. (self-study, school support staff, observations)

Independent inquiry is a key component of the academic expectations at the Parker school, and the library information services program is an important potential support of this expectation. As a member of the Central Massachusetts Regional Library System, the Parker School Library is able to provide access to high quality newspaper and periodical databases. Thirteen computer workstations allow classes to access both the databases and Internet search tools. Instruction is provided for students on search strategies. Each division includes research projects in alliance with the school's research rubric with each division's research becoming progressively more complex and demanding more resources. Teachers tend to teach research skills in the context of their own curriculum rather than in collaboration with the librarian. At this time, the library information program is not fully infused into the curriculum to augment student learning. (standards for research, self study, teachers)

With staffing limited to a twenty-hour per week professional librarian and a twelve-hour per week assistant, there are times when the library lacks adult supervision, and although there is access to the facility, the librarian is not always available to assist students in the use of information resources. Circulation of and use of materials without library supervision has resulted in loss of materials. The librarian, with the assistance of parent volunteers, is currently converting the collection for automation. Students have open access to the library and teachers may schedule classes via a calendar posted on the library doors. (observation, teachers, self study, student)

Currently, there are no written policies for materials selection, reconsideration, withdrawal of out-dated resources, or donations to the library. The student handbook contains a computer use agreement to be signed by students, which is currently being revised. The technology coordinator is responsible for the acquisition and removal of equipment as outlined in the school's technology plan. (facility tour, teachers, student handbook)

Student records are organized and secured in locked cabinets, but at this time, fireproof storage has not been utilized. A need has been expressed for more storage space for student portfolios. (self-study, facility tour, teachers)

Commendations

1. The extensive collaborative efforts of student support personnel (including special education, wellness, personal and college counseling) to provide services to all students
2. The addition of support staff personnel as a result of needs surveys

3. The exemplary commitment to the school's mission to personalize education and provide a caring adult for each student through the advisory program
4. The school's efforts to maximize the probability that all students have opportunities to experience success

Recommendations

1. Develop and implement a plan to provide professional library services throughout the school day and after school
2. Use all of the budgeted funds for the regular purchase of resources to support curriculum and instruction
3. Establish written policies for the selection, reconsideration, and removal of library resources
4. Plan for consistent storage of student portfolios and fireproof storage for confidential records

7

SUPPORT STANDARD

Community Resources for Learning

Active community and parent participation, facilities which support school programs and services, and dependable and adequate funding are necessary for the school to achieve its mission and expectations for student learning.

1. The school shall engage students and their families as partners in the students' education as well as encourage their participation in school programs and parent support groups.
2. The school shall foster productive business/community/higher education partnerships that support student learning.
3. The school site, plant, and equipment shall support and enhance all aspects of the educational program and the support services for student learning.
4. The school site, plant, and equipment shall be maintained to ensure an environment that is healthy and safe for all occupants.
5. There shall be a planned and adequately funded program of building and site management that ensures the maintenance and repair of facilities and equipment as well as the thorough and ongoing cleaning of the facility.
6. There shall be ongoing planning to address future program, staffing, facility, and technology needs as well as capital improvements.
7. The physical plant and facilities shall meet all applicable federal and state laws and be in compliance with local fire, health, and safety regulations.
8. The community and the district's governing body shall ensure an adequate and dependable source of revenue to provide and maintain appropriate school programs, personnel, services, facilities, equipment, technological support, materials, and supplies for student learning.
9. Faculty and building administrators shall have active involvement in the budgetary process, including its development and implementation.
10. Equipment shall be adequate, properly maintained, catalogued, and replaced when appropriate.
11. School board decisions, policies, and procedures and district plans shall support the implementation of the school's mission and expectations for student learning.

Conclusions

The Parker School reinforces its central mission of putting the child first in the educational process by promoting a strong partnership between the staff, the parents, and friends of the school. One hundred percent of the parents, staff members, and students surveyed agreed that the school invites parents to participate in school or classroom activities. Parents embrace the commitment to the school by volunteering a minimum of twenty hours per year of service. There are six standing committees, under the volunteer action group (VAG), which provide leadership and support for the school's mission and operations, co-curricular activities, special events, and facilitating on-going communications. The Parker Essential Fund (PEF), a separate tax-exempt organization, was established to coordinate the solicitation, receipt, and distribution of donations and gifts to the Parker School to financially enhance educational opportunities beyond the limits of the operational budget to directly benefit students. Over the past two years the fund has awarded grants to staff members and the school in excess of \$200,000. These resources have made a significant contribution to the on-going operation of the school, and the process of their acquisition provides a rally and focus to the parent-school relationship. (self-study, survey, parents, staff members, students)

The school reaches out to communicate with the parents and community in many ways. The Friday announcements that go home with students each week provide a rich view of the events, happenings, issues, successes, and opportunities occurring within the school. Parent forums that meet almost once a month with directed conversations about student issues, common concerns, and celebrations of student's successes further connect parents and the larger community to the school. Parents are also an integral part of the formation of each student's personal learning plan (PLP). The advisor, parent, and student establish yearly measurable and attainable goals and strategies that can be used for success. Collectively, the policies and actions of the school have created a strong and genuine culture that embraces and encourages involvement and collaboration from the larger community. (self-study, staff members, parents)

Parker School fosters and promotes extensive relationships with other charter schools and institutions of higher education including Harvard, Brown, and Fitchburg State. The establishment and maintenance of the regional Parker Teachers Center on-site provides the staff with professional development opportunities as well as providing a window for visitors from across the nation and world to examine and explore innovative educational practices. The school also reaches out to the larger community through a curriculum requirement of a senior project that requires students to make connections with individuals or institutions to aid/mentor/assist their research directed by an essential question. Senior project creates a bridge between the intellectual and academic challenge of Parker and the outside world. While the school has established strong relationships with the larger educational community, that type of relationship is not yet mirrored in the local business community. (self-survey, administrators, teachers)

The Parker School has just begun its third year in its current facility. The facility is a one-story building originally built in 1950 as an elementary school for children of U.S. Army

personnel. In 1970, an addition was added to house kindergarten. When Parker School leased the facility in 1999, extensive renovations were needed to accommodate the needs of a middle/high school population. The facility still retains a “little person” ambience. Locker and storage space is inadequate for current needs of the staff and students. The impact of the character of the building and physical restraints of space also restrict the acquisition of additional materials, supplies, and their use in the delivery of educational practice. (facility tour, observations, teachers)

The building remains under the ownership of MassDevelopment. The landlord tenant relationship is good, but the Parker School has a limited voice or control over future development in the area or in the quality or quantity of maintenance within the site. The Parker School currently is in its third year of a five-year lease with an option for another five years. The school site (exterior/grounds) is maintained by MassDevelopment and the physical plant (interior) is the responsibility of the Parker School. Parents, staff, and students are reasonably satisfied with current conditions. The classrooms are utilized virtually every time block of the day. The staff, parents, and the community indicate overall satisfaction with the ability of the building to support the delivery of the educational program. However, the attainment of current enrollment goal of 350-360 students has stretched the utilization of existing space to a maximum. This results in cramped space for office and support personnel and shared spaces for many disparate curricular offerings (chemistry/math, art/humanities, paired advisories, etc). Prior preparation involving set up of equipment or materials for a particular class or maintaining a set up over a period of time inhibits lab work or a studio structure. While the current use and structure of the physical plant sustains the current program, it does little to enhance or provide flexibility needed for the innovation and attainment of “best practices.” (observations, self-study, facility tour)

The school’s mechanical and electrical systems were upgraded at the time of renovations, including the full networking of the building for technology. Though the building is wired, the school has not yet completed its goal of providing an adequate number of networked workstations throughout the facility. The school has established a 5-year plan to implement this goal. In addition, the classrooms in the south-facing portion of the building can become exceptionally uncomfortable because of the solar gain through the windows. The school has tried to address the problem with the installation of pull-down shades and portable fans, but the condition continues to create a difficult educational environment. (site tour, surveys, documents, teachers)

Health and safety of the community is a high priority. Renovations made prior to occupancy include removal of asbestos, removal of worn carpet, new boilers, conversion to gas as a fuel, upgraded sprinklers, sewage pumps, and eye wash stations and showers in the science labs. The building has a certified total capacity of 420 persons. The 350 students and 68 staff members push the capacity of the building to its legal limit on a daily basis. (observations, certificate of capacity, school documents)

The school nurse, the health advisory council, and the school facility manager provide the monitoring of all health and safety issues in the school. Evidence of required inspections by fire, health, and Mass Development are up to date and indicate full compliance at time

of inspection with state and federal requirements. Limited appropriate storage areas can present problems with materials, boxes, furniture, and/or equipment stored in areas that create congestion limiting access or egress. An example of this type of safety concern is the obstruction of the entrance to the special needs office adjacent to the nurse's suite being partially blocked by tables, chairs, and boxes. (observations, facility tour, self-study)

The building is in full compliance with Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act. The adherence and priority given to the health and safety of the building occupants reinforces the mission of the school by fostering a climate of trust and security and emphasizes the importance of the individual in this community. (self-study, facility tour, observations)

Because of the lease arrangement with the Devens Development Authority, Parker Charter School is responsible only for maintenance and improvement under the roof and within the walls of the school. Outside maintenance and improvements are the responsibility of the landlord who has proven to be responsive to the school's needs. Hazardous waste found on site has been cleaned up, and monitoring wells are checked twice a year. The grounds are mowed and maintained in neat and attractive manner giving a welcoming appearance to the site. (observation, leadership team, meetings with facility manager)

The interior of the building is contracted to an outside service to be cleaned five (5) nights a week. Currently, the staff and facility manager handle daytime maintenance. A full-time day maintenance person is scheduled to be hired soon to allow the facility manager to focus more on long-range planning and to fulfill the job description of effectively overseeing the physical condition of the facility and ensuring that the maintenance and repair of facilities and equipment is thorough and ongoing and to allow the staff members to attend to their primary jobs. The maintenance of the facility is further enhanced by the demonstrated pride and care of the students and staff, who, through their recycling efforts and development of a culture of respect for themselves as a community, prevent needless or wasteful conditions (leadership team, observations, self-study)

Currently, technology and AV equipment is maintained and repaired by a full-time, in-house technology specialist. The presence in the school of much donated and older/used equipment and the school's limited financial resources to upgrade and replace keeps the technology specialist particularly busy keeping systems operating and up to date. Slightly less than half of the staff perceived the school's equipment as being adequate, maintained, or replaced when necessary. And yet, the staff clearly accepts the "less is more" philosophy of the mission statement and makes the best utilization of the technology and equipment given the existing availability and quality. (self-study, teachers, observations)

The board of trustees and the administration work diligently to develop plans and allocate funding for the on-going development of the school. The planning begins using the mission of the school to put the child first. As a true democratic school, all voices are

heard. Input for needs may come from any community member. Decisions for capital improvements, staffing, and support of programs are thoughtfully considered by the leadership team to prioritize the needs to sustain and improve the clear mission of the school. (self study, staff members, leadership team, trustees)

Central to all budget decisions is the commitment of the whole community to a low student/teacher ratio. The trustees encourage the school to consciously make the effort to allocate funds to promote the mission of the school. Being a charter school has benefits and difficulties. While there is a guarantee of tuition from sending districts, the school is unable to bond capital improvements or go to voters for additional monies for critical needs. The actual funds provided by the state are not determined by the school's documented needs but by the average per pupil cost in the sending district. Despite the difficulty of predicting resources from tuition because of varying enrollments from the over forty sending districts, any revenue deficits have been met by encouraging and accepting donations, grants, and fundraising efforts of the school community. A frugal, deliberate, and thoughtful budget process over the past years successfully combined with the solicitation of outside funds has brought sufficient revenues to meet the needs for salaries, operations, and capital expenditures and has resulted in a sizable surplus from which a five year capital budget plan has recently been implemented. (self-study, leadership team, observations)

Commendations

1. The outstanding fundraising efforts and donation of service to the school by the community in support of activities, enrichment of programs, and support of ideals
2. The commitment and success of the school's outreach programs and mission to serve as model of "best practice" to all educators through the inclusion and support of the Parker Teachers Center and the school's collaboration with institutions of higher learning
3. The exemplary efforts to communicate and to dedicate parents to the mission of the school and in the educational process of their children through personal learning plans, the school's web page, and Friday announcements
4. The commitment to maintaining a low student/teacher ratio that provides for highly personalized learning

Recommendations

1. Investigate, create, and activate a strategic plan to address the current and future space needs to support the current and future programs to allow the continuation of flexibility, improvement, and innovation in teacher practice
2. Develop and implement a realistic strategic plan to address and meet the long-term financial needs of the school to sustain the fulfillment of its stated mission as the institution matures
3. Create and implement a solution to the excessive heat in the affected classrooms

FOLLOW UP RESPONSIBILITIES

This comprehensive evaluation report reflects the findings of the school's self-study and those of the visiting committee. It provides a blueprint for the faculty, administration, and other officials to use to improve the quality of programs and services for the students in Francis W. Parker Charter Essential School. The faculty and board of trustees should also be apprised by the principal of yearly progress made addressing visiting committee recommendations.

Since it is in the best interest of the students that the citizens of the district become aware of the strengths and limitations of the school and suggested recommendations for improvement, the Commission requires that the evaluation report be made public in accordance with the Commission's Policy on Distribution, Use, and Scope of the Visiting Committee Report.

A school's continued accreditation is based on satisfactory progress implementing valid recommendations of the visiting committee and others identified by the Commission as it monitors the school's progress and changes which occur at the school throughout the decennial cycle. To monitor the school's progress in the Follow-Up Program, the Commission requires that the principal of Francis W. Parker Charter Essential School submit routine Two- and Five-Year Progress Reports documenting the current status of all evaluation report recommendations, with particular detail provided for any recommendation which may have been rejected or those items on which no action has been taken. In addition, responses must be detailed on all recommendations highlighted by the Commission in its notification letters to the school. School officials are expected to have completed or be in the final stages of completion of all valid visiting committee recommendations by the time the Five-Year Progress Report is submitted. The Commission may request additional Special Progress Reports if one or more of the Standards is not being met in a satisfactory manner or if additional information is needed on matters relating to evaluation report recommendations or substantive changes in the school.

To ensure that it has current information about the school, the Commission has an established Policy on Substantive Change requiring that principals of member schools report to the Commission within sixty (60) days of occurrence any substantive change which negatively impacts the school's adherence to the Commission's Standards for Accreditation. The report of substantive change must describe the change itself and detail any impact which the change has had on the school's ability to meet CPSS Standards. The Commission's Substantive Change Policy is included in the Appendix. All other substantive changes should be included in the Two and Five-Year Progress Reports and/or the Annual Report. Each member school is required to submit an Annual Report form to ensure that the Commission office has current statistical data on the school.

The Commission urges school officials to establish a formal follow-up program at once to review and implement all findings of the self-study and valid recommendations identified in the visiting committee report. An outline of the Follow-Up Program is

available in the Commission's *Accreditation Handbook* which was given to the school at the onset of the self-study. Additional direction regarding suggested procedures and reporting requirements is provided at Follow-Up Seminars offered by Commission staff following the on-site visit.

The members of the Francis W. Parker Charter Essential School Visiting Team wish to express their appreciation to the entire school staff, students, and community of Francis W. Parker Charter Essential School for the hospitality that was extended to the team during its visit to the school. The team found all members of the school community welcoming and eager to participate in the work of the visiting team and unified by their common goal to improve Francis W. Parker Charter Essential School.

NEW ENGLAND ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

COMMISSION ON PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS

VISITING COMMITTEE

ROSTER OF TEAM MEMBERS

Evaluated School	Administrator	Telephone
Francis W. Parker Charter Essential School	Teri Schrader, Principal	978-772-3293
Evaluator	School	Location
Ted Hall (Chair)	Souhegan High School	Amherst, NH
Henry Damon (Assistant Chair)	Concord-Carlisle High School	Concord, MA
Bonneau, Jacklyn	Mass, Academy of Math & Science	Worcester, MA
Canny, Brendan	Metropolitan Learning Center	Bloomfield, CT
Durrin Maloney, Brenda	Lenox Memorial Middle/High School	Lenox, MA
Graves, Pamela	Millbury Memorial Jr./Sr. High School	Millbury, MA
Jackson, Tobey	South Boston Harbor Academy Charter School	South Boston, MA
Lamarche, Pauline	Mass. Academy of Math & Science	Worcester, MA
Mancini, Anne Marie	Metropolitan Learning Center	Bloomfield, CT
Mooney, Bob	Reading Memorial High School	Reading, MA
Rapf, Bill	Souhegan High School	Amherst, NH
Ruggere, Timothy	North Reading High School	North Reading, MA
Silva, Peggy	Souhegan High School	Amherst, NH
Welch, Kathleen	Braintree High School	Braintree, MA

NEW ENGLAND ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

Commission on Public Secondary Schools

SUBSTANTIVE CHANGE POLICY

Principals of member schools must report to the Commission within sixty (60) days of occurrence any substantive change in the school which has a *negative impact* on the school's ability to meet any of the Commission's Standards for Accreditation. The report of a substantive change must describe the change itself as well as detail the impact of the change on the quality of education in the school. Examples of substantive change areas include the following:

- available programs, including fine arts, practical arts, and student activities
- available facilities, including upkeep and maintenance
- level of funding
- school day and/or school year
- administrative structure, including the number of administrators and supervisors
- number of teachers and/or guidance counselors
- number of support staff
- student services
- educational media services and personnel
- student enrollment
- grades served by the school
- the student population that causes program or staffing modification(s); e.g., the number of special needs students or vocational students or students with limited English proficiency

