

Seven-Year Site Visit Report

Hull, MA - May 1, 2002

South Shore Charter School (SSCS) is in its seventh year of operation and in its second charter term as a Commonwealth charter school serving 350 students in a comprehensive K-12 program. Its campus is divided among three buildings organized into two divisions, primary and secondary. The primary division is subdivided into multi-age levels: I (K-2), II (3-4) and III (5-7). The secondary division includes Level IV (8-10) and Level V (11-12). The buildings are spaced over several miles in the peninsular village of Hull, MA.

SSCS is committed to project based, experiential learning where students are involved in the life of the larger community and perform meaningful work that has academic and social utility. The curriculum is constructed around the *Core Knowledge Sequence* by E. D. Hirsch, and provides a rich detailed program that is correlated with the MA frameworks. The school's organization into two divisions reflects a focus on a developmental framework for students in grades K-7. The secondary level has developed a sequence of core courses that reflect the standards in the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks.

An eleven member Board of Trustees consisting of eight parents, one community member, two teachers (one representative from each level primary and secondary) and one student govern the operations of South Shore Charter School. At the time of the visit the Board was nearing final selection of a new Executive Director after a yearlong search for the candidate most suited to the school's needs.

South Shore Charter School draws its students from more than twenty communities in the South Shore area. Half of the students come from Hull, with considerable representation from Cohasset, Scituate, and Weymouth. The SSCS's charter caps the enrollment at 478. However, the limited facilities only permit SSCS to comfortably house 350 students. The school has maintained enrollment of 350 and above the past two years. The school has a moderate waiting list of 35 students most of whom are waiting for seats in the primary school. The secondary division is slightly under-enrolled by 25 students.

The site visit on May 1, 2001, was conducted by the following participants:

- Dr. Karen Laba, SchoolWorks Project Manager, Beverly, MA
- Emilys Peña, Assistant Headmaster, Boston High School, Boston MA
- Julie R. Lane, Director for Charter School Development, Charter School Office, MA DOE
- Rebecca Holmes, Director of Research and Finance, Charter School Office, MA DOE
- Melanie Winklosky, Special Assistant to the Board of Education, MA DOE
- Larry DeSalvatore, Jr. Ph.D., Assistant Director, Champion Charter School of Brockton, Brockton, MA
- Kathryn Ciffolillo, Freelance Editor/Writer, North Easton, MA
- Ruth Gass, Director, Ben Franklin Classical Charter School, Franklin, MA

Prior to the visit, the team reviewed the school's Accountability Plan, its most recent Annual Report, the Renewal Inspection Report, and student achievement data. At the school for the daylong visit, the team observed classes and met with the school's Administrative Coordinator, members of the Board of Trustees, parents, teachers and students.

The purpose of this visit is to corroborate and augment the information contained in the school's annual report and accountability plan and to collect information that will help the Commonwealth decide whether to renew its charter. The focus of the visit is on three central questions:

- Is the academic program a success?
- Is the school a viable organization?
- Is the school faithful to the terms of its charter?

The team's responses to these three questions are detailed below.

KEY QUESTION I: IS THE ACADEMIC PROGRAM A SUCCESS?

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

Primary:

Yes. The South Shore Charter School's written curriculum in Levels I (K-2), II (3-4) and III (5-7), is based on the national Core Knowledge Sequence (CKS). The primary grades were recognized by the Core Knowledge foundation as a Core Knowledge School in 1995. With the help of an outside educational consulting service, SSCS aligned their existing CKS curriculum with the MA Curriculum Frameworks. This alignment allowed faculty to address content that is not covered in the CKS and support improved student performance on the MCAS. The primary curriculum emphasizes math and language arts. SSCS adopted *Everyday Mathematics* for grades K-6 and used direct phonics instruction based on the program outlined in *Recipe for Reading*. The primary faculty also developed additional benchmarks in literacy and uses the *John Collins Writing* program to augment their writing curriculum.

SSCS uses a course of study designed to develop competence in basic skills and complements that with projects that helps students bring their content learning to life. Through the structure of the academic day and the organization of the curriculum the school provides a balanced academic and project-based learning environment. SSCS model of multi-aged classes and low student teacher ratios provides personalized guidance. Students typically spend mornings working individually or in small groups on grammar, writing, math and science while afternoons are reserved for projects arranged around three themes: environmental, international or community development. Projects not only provide opportunities for academic application, but also introduce students to governance and leadership.

The demands and complexity of projects increase with the levels. At Level I students are introduced to the project concept. At Level II, students are given a greater voice in developing project timelines and goals and at Level III projects are predominantly student-driven. Students spend 2-5 hours a week on projects and the focus group members unanimously claim the projects are the most worthwhile learning experiences as SSCS.

In the classrooms observed by the visiting team, most students were engaged and actively participating in the lesson. Spaces were brightly decorated with student work, and numerous plants and views of the ocean from many aspects contributed to the creation of a welcoming environment. Classroom work is fast-paced, often more reminiscent of an office than a schoolroom. Students corroborated the visiting team's observations that teachers make frequent use of cooperative groups, expecting students to be active learners by participating in discussions

and brainstorming sessions. The various tasks students were performing during the visit confirm that the curriculum material provided to us by the school engages students in lessons with a high degree of enthusiasm and interest.

Secondary:

Yes. The SSCS secondary academic program is based on traditional subject-based classes in the morning and projects in the afternoon. The secondary level has developed a sequence of core courses that are aligned with the Massachusetts curriculum frameworks.

Levels IV (8-10) and V (11-12) use the Integrated Math Program (IMP). The curriculum is very closely aligned with the Massachusetts frameworks. IMP integrates algebra, geometry, trigonometry, calculus, statistics, with an emphasis on solving "real world" problems. Much of the material in IMP is based on open-response questions, similar to the type found in one of the MCAS math sections. The secondary level uses the John Collins Writing program to supplement their language arts curriculum.

In the secondary division, class activity and discussions varied in quality, challenging in some cases and less engaging in others. Some teachers planned lively activities to make abstract concepts concrete. For example, the biology teacher planned a Jelly Bellyology activity to help students learn how to use a dichotomous key. The history teacher motivated students to learn vocabulary for an upcoming test by timing students' responses (approximately 20 terms defined in 2 minutes and 47 seconds). The IMP math teacher had students working on data collection of swinging pendulum using timers and Microsoft Excel. In physics, five students were testing batteries with lights. The English class was structured as a seminar, with a high level of engagement as students interpreted a haiku poem and brainstormed topics for their writer's notebooks.

The rigor of the curriculum taught is challenging and consistent with the standards reflected in the Massachusetts frameworks. Teachers' attention to maintaining high levels of student engagement contributes to the demonstration of rigorous expectations for all students. As described in school documents, projects at the upper grades bring students to the "point where project participation is defined by active communication, individually or in teams, with clients of the local and world community". Students value their involvement with a wide variety of project types, and some students described the lessons learned in a project as "life changing." One student joined the journalism project and since has decided that he wants to be a writer. Standards for student projects and promotion and graduation standards at SSCS are clear and explicit. Rubrics are used to score student work and students have learned to use the tool to evaluate their own performance. The quality of student work observed during the visit reflects high academic expectations at the secondary level.

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

Internal: Yes. Internal measures used by teachers at SSCS to regularly monitor progress toward proficiency are: student grades, student portfolios, progress reports, Exhibitions of Mastery, as well as additional Exit Standards. Student work is graded using rubrics that parallel the scoring used in the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS).

SSCS uses portfolio assessment with rubric-scored work products collected to demonstrate proficiency in content and skills. A new portfolio review process has been

developed to assess student work across the curriculum, in order to determine whether a student is ready to progress to the next level. Progress reports are comprehensive and detailed and communicate to parents their child's achievement.

Teachers in Levels III, IV and V use an electronic online grading system THINKWAVE. In the upper two levels, the program allows parents and students secure online access to their grades over the course of the marking period. Exhibitions of Mastery for the upper level students are required to receive passing grades on projects. Over the last school year, 94% of Level 1 students moved to Level II, 100% of Level II students advanced, and 90% of Level III students "passed" to the next higher grade. Fewer Level IV students achieve the passing grade (65%) and 94% of Level V students demonstrated sufficient mastery to graduate. Exit standards beyond the Exhibitions have been revised and refined to include both internal and external performance evaluations for promotion to the next level.

External: South Shore Charter School administers the Terra Nova norm referenced test and its students participate in the MCAS state assessments. In general, South Shore students rank above the national average on the Terra Nova. On the MCAS, students in the elementary grades generally meet or exceed state averages while secondary students vary in comparison to state averages.

Table 1: SSCS Terra Nova October 01

(mean nce)	(n)	Reading	Language	Math	Total	Science	Social Studies
Grade 1	22	65.8	72.5	58.1	65.0	Na	Na
Grade 2	23	66.2	58.4	71.3	65.8	60.7	67.2
Grade 3	24	58.2	55.7	61.0	59.3	62.6	60.3
Grade 4	15	62.8	60.9	62.1	62.8	60.1	62.0
Grade 5	31	69.3	70.2	66.9	69.8	66.1	67.2
Grade 6	21	70.7	68.9	66.0	70.1	69.1	71.1
Grade 7	25	70.4	66.2	63.98	67.1	66.8	71.0
Grade 8	24	63.7	62.3	59.4	61.8	61.3	63.9
Grade 9	20	58.6	57.5	54.5	57.6	56.7	57.6
Grade 10	15	50.8	50.3	48.0	49.8	50.4	52.1
Grade 11	7	60.3	50.1	48.4	51.0	63.1	58.4
Grade 12	6	82.2	77.5	64.2	77.2	77.8	80.2

Performance on the Terra Nova indicates that South Shore students perform at or above the national norm (50th percentile) in the total battery at all grades levels on the Fall, 2001 administration of the test.

MCAS: On the first administration of the MCAS Reading assessment for third graders, South Shore students did not perform as well as the average third grader in the state. Eighty seven percent of South Shore third graders scored at the Advanced and Proficient levels compared with 93% of students statewide.

Grade 3 Reading (2001 – first year tested)

		n	SS	A	P	W
Reading	SSCS	23	28	48	39	13
	State			62	31	7

Grade 4 students at SSCS exceeded state averages on the 2001 MCAS in English Language Arts and Mathematics tests. The most recent group of fourth graders at SSCS surpassed their previous fourth grade classmates on both tests.

Grade 4

		n	SS	A	P	NI	W
ELA	2000	33	232	0	21	61	18
	2001	31	240	0	65	32	3
	State		239	7	44	38	11
Math	2000	33	235	9	33	39	18
	2001	31	240	6	32	58	3
	State		235	10	24	46	19

Sixth graders were tested in Mathematics for the first time in Spring, 2001. South Shore sixth grade students exceeded the state average scaled scores, and had 10% fewer students in the warning category.

Grade 6 –Mathematics (2001 -- first year tested at this grade)

	n	SS	A	P	NI	W
SSCS	40	235	8	40	30	23
State		233	13	23	30	33

South Shore seventh graders also surpassed the statewide average scaled score in English Language Arts, although no SSCS students scored in the highest category for the test.

Grade 7–English Language Arts (2001 -- first year tested at this grade)

	n	SS	A	P	NI	W
SSCS	27	242	0	70	22	7
State		239	6	49	32	12

In the eighth grade, South Shore students fell below the state average scaled score in both English Language Arts and Mathematics. A higher percentage of SSCS students scored in the warning category in ELA, while the percentage of SSCS eighth grade students in 2001 almost matched the statewide percentage in the warning group for the Mathematics test. Far fewer members of the 2001 class of eighth graders scored in the lowest rank than did their predecessors in the class of 2000, a positive trend for South Shore.

Grade 8

ELA		n	SS	A	P	NI	W
2000	SSCS		236	8	50	27	15
2001	SSCS	26	234	0	46	36	18
2001	State		242	8	59	25	8
Math							
2000	SSCS		223	8	19	19	54
2001	SSCS	26	224	0	7	61	32
2001	State		233	11	23	34	31

South Shore enrolls a very small number of students in the tenth grade, making comparisons with state averages less than reliable. However, the trend over the past two years among class groups at SSCS shows a smaller percentage of students scoring in the Failing category for both the English Language Arts and Mathematics components of the MCAS. Passing scores on these two assessments are now required for graduation for all students, raising concern for the 40% of SSCS students failing mathematics, and the 13% failing ELA. Information on test retakes was not discussed due to the small number of students involved.

Grade 10

ELA		n	SS	A	P	NI	F
2000	SSCS		17	230	12	12	47
2001	SSCS		15	230	0	20	67

2001	State	239	15	35	31	18
Math						
2000	SSCS	17	227	12	29	53
2001	SSCS	15	224	0	7	40
2001	State	237	18	27	30	25

Overall, students in the elementary grades at South Shore Charter School outperform their statewide peers on the MCAS tests. At the eighth and tenth grade, South Shore students are not as successful in comparison to state averages, but trends among consecutive groups of students at South Shore show fewer ranking in the lowest score categories.

KEY QUESTION II: IS THE SCHOOL A VIABLE ORGANIZATION?

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

Yes. Several core elements of the mission of SSCS were consistently communicated in interviews with board members, staff, students, and parents. During the interviews, there were numerous references to SSCS as a school that fosters teamwork and leadership skills through its focus on project based learning. Members of the Board of Trustees described SSCS as a "small community" where every student counts and where students get involved in the governance process that emphasizes leadership and teamwork. Teachers explained that through projects, students learn to work as a team and accomplish a goal. Students articulated that the school has helped them learn about themselves by providing an education that focuses on life skills, responsibility, and independence. Parents reiterated the students’ words, praising SSCS for helping develop a well-rounded person by proving an education that focuses on students’ social and emotional development.

- Is the school safe?

Yes. All stakeholders interviewed expressed that SSCS is a safe school. Evidence from classroom observations reveals effective classroom management in most cases. Students were on task and seemed to follow class rules in most cases. Parents explained that no fighting occurs at SSCS and they feel the school is very safe. Administrators and students attribute the respectful treatment of teachers for students as a primary factor that contributes to the school’s safe and nurturing environment.

- Are the physical facilities adequate for the program of the school?

The number one complaint voiced by parents, teachers, students, and board members was the lack of appropriate physical facilities. SSCS is housed in three different buildings, each with leases with different terms. The search for an adequate school building and site has been a priority for the facilities committee. Teachers and administrators make the best out of their available space. However, everyone from the Board to the students expressed a desire to relocate to a bigger campus. The lack of appropriate facilities limits long term planning.

Some of the classrooms at the secondary school are barely suitable to accommodate small class sizes. The secondary facility lacks a library and laboratory space. The elementary facility is lined with windows overlooking the harbor and the Boston skyline in the distance. Rooms are bright and cheerful. The middle grades' building has comfortable though not generous classroom space and sufficient resources for the students to be served.

The primary school built a playground next to each of its two buildings with ample space for students at recess and for outdoor physical education, the secondary school faces a parking lot with no designated area for physical activities. Parents of students at both the primary and secondary levels voiced a need for a gymnasium.

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

Yes. The professional staff at SSCS is qualified and has the experience to support the school's academic program. According to the current staff roster, most teachers at SSCS have earned degrees in the area to which they are assigned, and are trained in their subject area. Teaching experience varies with a mix of new and veteran teachers.

Years in Education	1-4	5-9	10+
SSCS staff	15	12	10

The school has also retained a core group of staff members and continues to add new faculty, producing a wide distribution of experience.

Years at SSCS	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
Number of Staff	6	6	6	2	4	9	11

New teachers are given the opportunity to participate in a mentoring program with a veteran teacher serving as their support. Resources are effectively used for professional training in Core Knowledge Sequence, Everyday Math, and IMP.

- Does the school have an effective governance structure and administrative organization for carrying out the purposes and objectives of the school?

The Board consists of members who represent a range of community interests, including legal services, business, and mental health providers. All but one voting member of the Board are also parents of students at SSCS, and many began their association with the school when their children enrolled. One SSCS student sits on the Board for a one year term, and two teachers and the Executive Director serve as ex officio members. Drawing on advice from the Department of Education "Blue Book," the South Shore Charter School Board has constructed a draft of roles and responsibilities for its own members and for the administrators of the school. The list includes items that assure compliance with legal requirements as well as the generic charge to develop policies that ensure that the school meets the commitments of its charter.

According to interviews during the site visit, recent Board discussions have focused on teacher salaries, new facilities and hiring a new Executive Director. The search for the Director has been a persistent challenge to the Board, given the broad grade range of the school and its

blend of Core Knowledge and project based learning. Presently, the school leadership team consists of the Heads of the Secondary Schools, the Special Education Administrator, the Finance Director coordinated by the Head of the Primary School, a founding staff member with broad understanding of the school's needs.

From interviews during the site visit, there were indications of some tension between the Board and administrative team. The departure of key administrators and the delay in appointing a new Executive Director has challenged the current administrators to perform additional tasks beyond their regular responsibilities for an extended time. As one parent put it, "There seems to be a cultural divide between business people and educators" and there are "no voting educators on the Board". Communication between Board and school leaders appears to be less free-flowing and clear than would be ideal. Board members noted that mediation between their membership and SSCS staff was planned. The present Director search and appointment will be a critical period for the school's governance structure.

The administrative organization consists of an Executive Director (vacant at the time of the site visit), the Head of the Primary School and the Head of the Secondary School. In addition to the Head, there are three experienced teachers serve as level coordinators for each multi-grade configuration, liaisons between the Primary Head and the remote facilities. The heads of the Primary and Secondary schools carry out daily management of operations and monitoring of instruction. They are responsible for teacher evaluation and curriculum coordination within and across levels. The school has a Director of Special Services for K-12 who is responsible for servicing all students with IEP or 504 plans. The Head of the Secondary school recently resigned and the assistant head will be taking over as interim and a search committee has been formed to fill this permanently.

The school has maintained a stable enrollment over the course of its seven years of operation, with an ongoing decline in the number of students attending in the secondary grades. The reasons for withdrawal have been consistent over time, namely, a desire for more program and extracurricular options than available at SSCS. The small size of Levels IV and V (grades 8-12) and their location in a separate facility, as well as the change in the organization of the academic program into more 'traditional' subject area blocks, promotes the impression that it is a discrete "school" under the SSCS model. School leaders face the challenge of maintaining a sense of unity among all divisions of the school, particularly one distributed among three locations.

- Are parents satisfied with the performance of the school?

Yes. Parents feel like they are "partners in the education of their children". Parents attending the focus group explained that they felt welcomed and appreciated the frequent communication with the school. Parents are actively engaged and involved in numerous aspects of the school. For example, they are involved in the search for a new Executive Director, they participate in hiring decisions, and they volunteer in classrooms. Parents praised the attention teachers provided their children. Many parents (especially at the secondary level) choose SSCS because traditional school had not worked for their children. They attribute the small class size and the sense of family and community to why their children are prospering educationally. Parents echoed their children's comments that the school is safe. Parents enjoy the detailed progress reports they receive three times a year at the primary levels and four times a year at the secondary. In Level 1, teachers write a page for each subject area talking about their child's strengths and areas needing improvement.

The results of a comprehensive survey distributed at the end of the 2000-2001 school year support the sentiments expressed by the small sample of parents at the focus group. The survey invites responses to questions specifically linked to the school's charter and accountability plan, allowing the school to focus its attention and the attention of the parents responding to the survey on the actual terms of the school's operating charter. A summary of the survey results included in the school's *2001 Annual Report* indicates strong support in almost all areas, with a few expressions of disagreement in the discussion of adequate facilities and computer ratios.

KEY QUESTION III: IS THE SCHOOL FAITHFUL TO THE TERMS OF ITS CHARTER?

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

Yes. As far as could be determined, the school complies with the essential legal and regulatory requirements. SSCS underwent a Program Quality Assurance audit in the Spring of 1998 and a mid-cycle audit in January 2002 conducted by the Department of Education to assess the school's compliance with federal requirements for special education, Title I, and civil rights regulations. The school submitted a corrective action plan for areas of non-compliance, which was accepted by the Department of Education. The school continues to submit progress reports. The school runs a longer school day than typical and provided instruction for 189 days for the 2001-2002 school year, exceeding state instructional time requirements by 138 hours at the Secondary Level and 48 hours at the Primary Level.

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

Yes. In addition to hosting visitors from other schools and agencies, South Shore Charter School has been featured in broadcast media programs and has been the subject of published articles in the *Boston Globe*, *Core Knowledge Foundation* magazine, *Hull Times* and others. Topics include incorporating art into the Open Circle curriculum, senior citizens as reading tutors, teaching every child to read and project-based learning. Faculty presentations include several at the MA Charter School Association, the 10th Core Knowledge National Conference and the Brooklyn District 17 Core Knowledge Conference. Students presented at the MA Service Learning Conference about project-based learning. The Board presented to the MA Charter School Association Best Practices Conference about board meeting effectiveness and organization.

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

Yes. South Shore Charter School has been successful at maintaining its focus on the central elements of its mission "to foster initiative, critical thinking, leadership, teamwork, and communication". This is achieved through multi-age classrooms where students work independently or in groups fostering teamwork and communication. SSCS also promotes life skills through their community-based learning projects. Projects not only provide opportunities for the application of academic learning to authentic situations, but also introduce students to governance and leadership, allowing them to take responsibility for organization and planning. Students are encouraged to learn to take risks, make mistakes and learn from those mistakes. There are lessons incorporated into the school program to learn conflict resolution skills and ethical behavior.

Another aspect of the mission calls for "dissemination of SSCS educational model across Massachusetts". As stated earlier SSCS has worked diligently to disseminate its model. Students are particularly involved in the dissemination. For example students participate in a "Speaking America Contest", No Place for Hate Day in Hull, the Diversity Fair at Hull High School, Biodiversity Day, Aids Walk, Community Art Show, and a Hike for Habitat for Humanity. In addition to the school's mission statement, its accountability plan also lists the goals and targets it proposes to use to assess its performance. The site visit does not allow sufficient time to conduct a complete audit of the school's performance against all its accountability plan goals, but a summary of some of the school's major steps in each area is included below.

Student performance goals: The student performance goals listed in the SSCS Accountability Plan reiterate the learning standards that students will meet as they complete the academic program at the school. Standards are listed by Levels and then by proficiency skills such as communication skills, leadership, initiative, communication, community hours and reflection. A revised list of exit standards indicate which skills and knowledge students will demonstrate to advance from one level to the next. As indicated in the 2001 Annual Report and in response to Key Question 1 in this report, almost all the targets for academic achievement and advancement have been met for the 2001 term.

School performance goals: Many of the targets for school performance are in progress or have been partially met.

--*curriculum aligned with the MA frameworks:* K-8 correlation between the Core Knowledge sequence and the MA Curriculum Frameworks has been completed, and the secondary sequence is in process. The school has constructed a scope and sequence for secondary courses consistent with that expected by the state assessments.

-- *access to quality projects:* SSCS has developed a list of criteria for projects which were met by all activities for the 2000-2001 school year.

--*provisions for professional development:* little detail was gathered on this objective, beyond the reference to the funds expended for professional development for the previous school year.

--*academic program will meet all statutory and regulatory requirements:* As noted earlier, the academic program and special services have been reviewed by the Department of Education and is meeting compliance requirements indicated by that review. Because of its longer school day and year, SSCS exceeds the learning time requirements for MA.

--*meet MCAS performance goals as defined by the DOE:* This report details the most recent results of the MCAS tests, indicating stronger than average performance by elementary level students and weaker performance compared with state averages among students in the upper grades.

--*no less than 50th percentile (nce) on norm referenced tests in reading, language arts and math:* As presented in the first section of this report, the school has met this target.

--*promote a mutually respectful culture:* Surveys of students, parents and staff show only a 51% agreement on items related to this goal, less than the 80% target.

--*provide a responsive family partnership:* According to survey results, the SSCS met its 80% target for this goal.

--*disseminate the SSCS model:* As presented earlier, a number of school staff as well as students have served as presenters of the SSCS model to other educators and agencies.

-- *work with district schools to improve education for all students:* The school's 2001 Annual Report lists a number of joint activities that indicate positive steps toward this goal.

Conclusion: The South Shore Charter School continues to succeed at its academic as well as its social mission to the benefit of the children and parents who are part of the SSCS community. A slight variation among stakeholders about the SSCS mission was revealed in interviews, with Board members, teachers and students focusing more on academics and college prep than on project based learning, both of which are core elements in the mission statement. SSCS students' academic performance is strong particularly in the elementary grades and they are successful as they graduate to further education. A well-developed administrative structure has been hampered by the absence of an Executive Director over the past year, but continues to support the ongoing refinement of the instructional program. While struggling over some issues, both Board and administrators demonstrate a strong commitment to maintaining the supportive learning environment that nourishes the energy and enthusiasm of the staff and students, an essential factor contributing to the school's success.