

February 5, 2008

Norwell, MA

South Shore Charter Public School, (SSCPS) located in Norwell, opened in 1995 with 150 students in Kindergarten through Grade 2 and grades 6-12. The school gives preference in admission to students residing in its designated region comprised of the districts of Abington, Braintree, Brockton, Cohasset, Duxbury, East Bridgewater, Halifax, Hanover, Hanson, Hingham, Holbrook, Hull, Kingston, Marshfield, Norwell, Pembroke, Plymouth, Plympton, Quincy, Randolph, Rockland, Scituate, Weymouth and Whitman. In 1996 the school added third, fourth and fifth grades to become a K-12 school. The school is in its thirteenth year of operation. SSCPS has been granted two charter renewals, in 2000 and 2005. In November 2005, the Board of Education granted the school's amendment request to raise its enrollment cap from 468 to 540 students. As of October 1, 2007, the school enrolled 525 students.

The educational philosophy at SSCPS emphasizes both the development of basic skills and the application of these skills in cross-disciplinary, experiential projects. The school mission states,

[SSCPS] inspires students to achieve their potential in academics, career, and life. This is accomplished with an innovative curriculum that addresses the learning styles of the individual student, complemented by a real life experiential learning program, within a community that encourages service, leadership, and respect.

The school is organized into multi-age, multi-grade classrooms by Levels: Level I (K-2), II (3-4), III (5-6), IV (7-8), and the High School. However, the school has modified this approach to instruction so that math and several other subjects are taught by grade level.

Of the 525 students enrolled at SSCPS, 54% are male and 46% are female; no students are classified as Limited English Proficient; 18.75% qualify for free- and reduced-price lunch; 17% receive special education services; and 13% are eligible for Title I services. The racial and ethnic composition of the student body, as reported by the school, is 72% White, 20% African-American, 3.5% Mixed Race, 2.5% Hispanic, and 3% Asian.

The following participants conducted the site visit on February 5, 2008:

- Anthony Ashton, MA ESE, Charter School Office
- Kerry Kennedy, Atlantis Charter School
- Joshua Lavine MA ESE, Charter School Office
- Paul Niles, Cape Cod Lighthouse Charter School
- Jesse Robinson, Harvard Graduate School of Education

Before the visit, the site team reviewed the SSCPS 2006-07 Annual Report, student assessment data, the Accountability Plan, board minutes and materials, and the 2006-07 Year Twelve Site Visit Report. On site, the team reviewed curricular information, the teacher roster, and other information provided by the school. The team performed a total of 23 classroom observations in all grade levels and interviewed seven trustees, five administrators, fourteen teachers, ten families, and twelve students.

The purpose of this visit was to corroborate and augment the information contained in the school's Annual Report, to investigate the school's progress relative to its Accountability Plan

goals, and to collect information that will help the Commissioner and Board of Education make a renewal recommendation for the school's charter. The focus of the visit is on three central areas of inquiry:

- Faithfulness to the terms of the school's charter;
- Academic program success;
- Organizational viability.

The team's findings in each of these areas are presented below.

I. Faithfulness to the Terms of the Charter

Are the school's mission, vision, educational philosophy, and pedagogical approach, as articulated in the charter and subsequent amendments, clear and understood by the school community?

Finding: The school's mission, vision, and educational philosophy were clearly understood by the school community.

All stakeholders described two integral parts of the school's mission and educational philosophy as providing opportunities to connect the life of the school to the larger world and focusing on the learning styles of individual students. Members of all focus groups stated that the school's educational philosophy places a great deal of value on developing students to be independent thinkers and cooperative learners. Students noted that the school aims to provide them with opportunities to work together and develop leadership skills that will allow them to make an impact in the community. Family members stated that the school strives to prepare students for college and the world at large.

Has the school met or is it making progress toward meeting the faithfulness to charter goals set out in its Accountability Plan?

Finding: The school continues to make progress towards meeting most of the faithfulness to charter goals presented in its approved Accountability Plan.

SSCPS's Accountability Plan contains three faithfulness to charter objectives, each with specific expectations and strategies for attainment. The objectives are:

- Objective # 1: SSCPS will remain faithful to our charter in providing a balanced academic and project-based learning environment.
- Objective # 2: SSCPS will remain faithful to our charter by promoting a respectful culture and a responsive family/school partnership.
- Objective # 3: SSCPS will remain faithful to our charter and share the strengths of our model with schools and educators throughout the Commonwealth.

The school reported making progress towards meeting most of these objectives in its 2006-07 Annual Report and team members corroborated this through observations. Team members noted that the school shows a commitment to providing a balanced academic and project based learning environment. Administrators noted the school has made progress in developing curriculum documents and has developed a regular schedule for revision. Similarly, the school has begun the process of documenting and developing the projects and workshops it offers. In most classroom observations, team members observed respectful student-to-student and teacher-

to-student interactions. The school's 2006-07 Annual Report provided survey results from its annual satisfaction survey; however, it did not provide specific results from groups surveyed or a response rate.

Over the past year, the school has made efforts to disseminate best practices throughout the Commonwealth. Administrators and teacher described several presentations made at local conferences and the school provided detailed information in its 2006-07 Annual Report about dissemination. This year the school has convened a meeting of administrators from high need districts to investigate ways that they can collaborate, sharing staff, applying for grants as a consortium, and offering common professional development programs. The collaboration has resulted in SSCPS partnering with Holbrook and Randolph schools to apply for a grant with Teachers21 to provide on-going training and coaches in the three districts. The interim executive director has joined the South Shore Collaborative Professional Development Committee. The school is planning to host a series of workshops for members of the collaborative on autism and the implications for learning and teaching.

II. Academic Program Success

A. Curriculum

What is included in the documentation of the curriculum and what form does it take?

Finding: The school's documented curriculum is based upon the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks (MCF), the school's domain specific content standards, the Core Knowledge Sequence, and school developed life skills objectives. The school has also developed an annual curriculum revision process.

The SSCPS K-8 curriculum follows the Core Knowledge Sequence and has also been aligned with the MCF; the high school curriculum was developed using the MCF. The majority of the school's curriculum is based upon teacher-generated resources, however the Singapore math program is used in all grades. This year the kindergarten is piloting a new reading program developed by Core Knowledge.

The school has begun the process of revising the curriculum through the creation of curriculum documents for all grade levels and subject areas. Each year the school chooses one or two subjects to review and teachers across grade levels collaborate to generate maps. Two years ago the school reviewed the English language arts (ELA) curriculum and this past year the school reviewed the science curriculum. The revision began with all science teachers discussing the larger conceptual ideas covered. A smaller group of six teachers from all grade levels then worked together to break down the MCF standards and create the curriculum documents, which include scope and sequence, unit topics, key questions, unit assessments, and other related resources. This year a team of two science teachers are working to ensure implementation of the new curriculum across grade levels. The school is reviewing the social studies curriculum this year and has plans to review the Singapore math curriculum next year to better align it to the MCF. *Future visitors should note further revision of the school's curriculum.*

Finding: The creation of curriculum documents and portfolios for all projects and workshops is a priority for the school this year.

The SSCPS project and workshop model is designed to provide students with experiential learning opportunities. All students in Levels I-IV participate in projects with the goal of providing opportunities to apply academic lessons and introduce concepts of governance and leadership. Most projects are based around themes of environmental, international, and community development. They are designed to require long-range planning and organizational skills and are centered upon student leadership and cooperation. All projects are designed to have a community service ethic embedded into the work that students are doing. Level I students work on projects with their homeroom teachers, while Level II, III, and IV students are mixed into interclass groups. In the high school, students enroll in workshops that are designed to be similar to projects but have a more academic focus. Workshops are designed around a master/apprentice model with the goal of allowing students to gain an in-depth understanding of an area of interest. High school workshops maintain many of the features of projects with an emphasis on community service and communication. In the 2007-08 school year, the high school offered ten different workshops that ranged from journalism to biology. All students must complete all project requirements and present an Exhibition of Mastery related to their projects to meet the school's exit standards. Exhibitions of Mastery are judged using a rubric and are evaluated by multiple staff members and some external judges.

At the end of the 2006-07 school year, the school held a series of full day and half-day professional development workshops that focused on developing the school's projects and workshops. A central component of the professional development was to identify life skills that teachers believed were most essential. As a result of the professional development, the school created a "life skills" curriculum for all levels. Administrators stated that a goal of the curriculum was to articulate specific skills that would be taught at all levels and provide a basis for integrating life skills into the academic and project / workshop curriculum. The developed curriculum provides specific goals for each of the school's levels in the areas of organization, accountability, character, communication, and teamwork.

In addition to developing the life skills curriculum, the school has also begun the process of refining the components of its projects and workshop curriculum. Administrators stated that this year the school is requiring teachers to document curriculum materials and project overviews that include intended learning outcomes, a curriculum map timeline, lesson plans, budget, assessment materials, samples of student work, domain specific documents, and exhibition of mastery plans. Team members reviewed maps and noted that they had been created for all projects and workshops taking place during the 2007-08 school year.

How is the curriculum reviewed for quality and effectiveness?

Finding: The school uses data to develop the curriculum but would like to expand the role of formative assessments to guide instruction and curriculum development.

Two years ago the school began working with the ACCEPT Education Collaborative to help the school better use data in understanding where students are struggling and in developing targets for student performance. Administrators stated that the school uses data from several assessments but would like to move towards formative assessments that are standards based. The school currently uses data from annual administration of the MCAS and TerraNova (for grades 2-8) that is disaggregated for individual students. Administrators noted that an emphasis for this school year was open response writing, identified as an area for improvement through MCAS data analysis. Teachers are working to integrate open response writing into all subject

areas and administrators stated that they are working with staff to look at writing samples and use rubrics to develop a common understanding of expectations.

The school administers the DIBELS assessment three times a year to all Level I, II, and III students, and the Lexia computer based program is used regularly to track phonemic awareness. The school reported that information from the DIBELS, MCAS, the TerraNova, and teacher/parent referrals is used to identify students that need additional support in reading and/or math.

Teachers noted that the school periodically gives practice MCAS assessments in math and science, which are beginning to be tracked using TestWiz software. Administrators stated that level coordinators were in the process of being trained on how to use the program to better track student performance on assessments. Teachers meet weekly by level with their Level Coordinators to discuss curriculum and assessments; however, administrators stated that discussion of data is at the discretion of the Level Coordinators. *Future visitors should note changes in the school's assessments and use of data.*

Finding: The school has developed and implemented internal standards for student academic achievement and promotion.

The school measures each student's academic achievement by reviewing his/her Exit Standards Checklist. These checklists, built for each Level, include internal and external performance evaluations, a portfolio, and demonstration of community service. The site visit team reviewed the Exit Standards Checklists, and the school included Exit Standards Checklists for each level in the 2006-07 Annual Report. The school reported that at least 90% of students in all levels met the standards for promotion. Students described the exit standards as providing an outline of the requirements for passing to the next level and said that they were well understood.

Administrators stated the school is in the process of reviewing exit standards to make them more concrete and measurable. Specifically, they stated that they would like to break down exit standards within levels to set specific concepts and skills students will be able to demonstrate. Administrators stated that new standards would be in place by the end of the 2008-09 school year. *Future visitors should note any changes in the school's standards and their implementation.*

B. Instruction and Learning

Is the observed instructional practice aligned with what is described verbally and in writing?

Finding: Team members observed varying levels of implementation of the strategies the school has identified as goals for improving instruction.

Administrators stated that the school has begun to provide teachers with professional development training based upon the theme of "Linking Instruction and Assessment to Enhance Students Learning." The school has provided support to teachers using materials provided by the Research for Better Teaching (RBT) training and consulting group. All teachers and three administrators attended a six-day workshop led by RBT at the beginning of the school year to establish a uniform set of expectations for instruction and create a common vocabulary for teachers and administrators. The school's executive director noted several strategies that team

members might observe, such as varied questioning techniques, use of wait time, and framing of the learning objective.

In classroom observations Level I teachers seemed to be implementing many of the teaching strategies described by the school administration. In other levels, team members did not always see consistent use of identified strategies. In Level I classes, team members noted that teachers often framed the learning objective to a specific purpose. Team members also observed the use of wait time and teachers providing students with clear expectations for activities. In approximately half of Level II, III, and IV classes, team members observed clear objectives being presented; however in others, objectives were either not clear or not presented. Classes in these levels used a variety of questions, but most were low-level direct knowledge questions. In the high school, team members observed examples of higher level questioning in approximately half of the classrooms observed. Because students were allowed to call out responses to questions, team members observed few examples of wait time. Most classes in the high school were observed to present a clear learning objective, although team members noted that the content being covered was relatively low level for the grade level that was observed.

Finding: Team members observed high levels of student engagement in Level I classes but mixed levels of student engagement in all other levels.

Classes in Level I were observed to have high levels of student engagement and participation. Several classes were observed to have students working independently or in small groups. In Levels II, III, and IV, team members noted that student engagement varied across classrooms. Team members observed that some group activities lacked structure, causing students to get off task. In some cases, students working independently were not focused on completing the assignment. In the high school, classes were also observed to have mixed levels of student engagement. Team members noted that in the majority of classes, engagement was more attentive than responsive. In several classes information was presented in a lecture or discussion format and student participation was limited to the few students who volunteered. In other classes students were observed working independently or in small groups. In the majority of these classes students showed high levels of engagement, though in a few cases students who completed the assignment early became off task.

Finding: The school is committed to the further development of its projects and workshops, an important component of the school's academic program. Team members observed a wide range of academic content and rigor in implementation.

As described earlier, the school has worked over the past year to establish requirements and develop staff understanding of the project / workshop model. Team members were able to observe several of the workshops and noted a range of academic content and rigor. Some projects appeared to be carefully planned and executed, such as a cooking workshop in which students conducted cooking experiments following the scientific process, but others did not appear to have extensive teacher oversight or a clear academic focus. Observations were consistent with what the students described during the high school focus group. Students stated that some projects were the most challenging classes, while others are the easiest. Administrators described projects and workshops as based on a combination of the MCF and domain specific content. *Future visitors to the school should note further alignment of the project / workshop model to the standards outlined by the school.*

Does the school environment support student learning? How?

Finding: Stakeholders explained that the school's changing demographics provide a range of challenges to the academic program and the school identified several programs that have been developed to meet the needs of all students.

Teachers, administrators, parents, and board members noted that the school's changing demographics present a challenge in that most new students are academically behind students that have been at the school. Administrators also reported that the school has seen an increase in the population of students in need of special education services over the past several years. In response to this change, the school has made several modifications to its support services and staff with an emphasis on being more proactive. This year the school added a full time learning service teacher in the lower grades to service the increase in students with IEP's. The school also reports having increased the number of learning service paraprofessionals in grades K-8 to assist with the needs of students. Additionally, the school has brought in a consultant for screening and tutoring of English language learners and has sought the support of a school psychologist who has been working with teachers on communication strategies with the school's Haitian population.

The school has also started a remedial math program for struggling students, which is provided in place of Spanish class. Similarly, high school students can participate in an academic workshop that provides extra support during the project and workshop time in the afternoon. The school also offers an after school homework club that is fee based; however, the school provides scholarships for students that are eligible. This year the school offers an after school program through the South Shore YMCA. In addition to the homework club, debate team, and math club, the school is looking into offering more extended day activities for 2008-09.

The school's executive director stated that several changes are being planned for the 2008-09 school year to better support students' learning. Students in Level IV and the high school will be on the same schedule, allowing students at higher and lower levels of achievement to take classes at their appropriate level. The school also plans to hire an additional math teacher to work with students in grades seven through ten in order to allow for more grouping by performance. Starting at grade seven, the school will coordinate with students, parents, and an advisor to write an academic plan that uses data to identify goals for student achievement for the school year. The school also plans to begin a mandatory first year institute for all new high school students that is focused on getting new students and faculty familiar with the school's expectations.

C. Student Achievement

Are students reaching Proficiency on state standards, as measured by the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS)?

Finding: SSCPS MCAS test scores show a mixed level of performance.

MCAS results from the last four years are presented below in Tables I, II, and III. These tables include the Composite Performance Index (CPI), which reflects the distribution of student scores over four MCAS performance categories. The CPI is a 100-point index that measures the extent to which students are progressing towards proficiency.

Table I: SSCPS ELA MCAS Test Results, 2004-2007

ELA	Students Included	% Advanced	% Proficient	% Needs Improvement	% Warning/Failing	CPI
Grade 3						
2004	23	0	43	52	4	80.4
2005	40	0	60	33	8	83.1
2006	37	11	49	35	5	83.1
2007	37	5	51	30	14	77.7
Grade 4						
2004	34	3	41	50	6	78.7
2005	36	3	22	47	28	62.9
2006	38	0	32	53	16	68.4
2007	38	0	50	47	3	78.3
Grade 5						
2006	32	3	38	38	22	71.9
2007	41	7	49	44	0	84.8
Grade 6						
2006	40	5	70	23	3	90.6
2007	36	3	47	44	6	81.3
Grade 7						
2004	38	5	79	13	3	94.7
2005	38	3	61	29	8	87.5
2006	34	0	62	32	6	84.6
2007	38	5	63	29	3	89.5
Grade 8						
2006	39	13	67	18	3	92.3
2007	34	0	88	12	0	96.3
Grade 10						
2004	19	11	63	26	0	92.1
2005	30	10	53	33	3	85.8
2006	33	9	73	15	3	93.2
2007	37	3	54	43	0	87.2

Student performance on the English language arts MCAS examination has been inconsistent. Scores have shown some decline over the past year, with grades three and six showing an increase in the number of students scoring in the Warning/Failing category and a decrease in CPI. In grades four, five, seven, and eight student performance has increased, with an increase in students scoring Proficient or Advanced and an increase in CPI.

Table II: SSCPS Mathematics MCAS Test Results, 2004-2007

Math	Students Included	% Advanced	% Proficient	% Needs Improvement	% Warning/Failing	CPI
Grade 3						
2006	37	0	41	38	22	72.3
2007	37	0	41	30	30	67.6
Grade 4						
2004	34	12	26	50	12	73.5
2005	36	6	8	50	36	55.1
2006	39	0	23	49	28	59.0
2007	39	10	26	56	8	70.5
Grade 5						
2006	32	6	16	34	44	53.9
2007	41	17	34	39	10	78
Grade 6						
2004	25	8	32	36	24	69.0
2005	36	6	22	39	33	60.4
2006	41	5	39	29	27	68.9
2007	37	8	24	30	38	60.1
Grade 7						
2006	34	3	24	47	26	63.2
2007	39	8	38	31	23	71.8
Grade 8						
2004	28	4	25	50	21	66.1
2005	40	5	35	33	28	65.6
2006	39	10	23	28	38	60.3
2007	34	6	29	47	18	69.1
Grade 10						
2004	19	11	42	47	0	85.5
2005	30	17	27	47	10	73.3
2006	32	34	34	25	6	87.5
2007	35	20	37	37	6	80.7

Performance on the MCAS examinations in mathematics has also been mixed, with some grades showing improvement and others showing decline. The most significant improvement in 2006-07 was seen in grade five, which had an increase in the number of students scoring Proficient and Advanced and a decline in the number of students scoring in the Warning/Failing category. Grade four showed a similar improvement: fewer students scored in the Warning/Failing category and there was an 11.5-point increase in CPI. Performance also improved in grades seven and eight, with a slight increase in the number of students scoring Proficient and Advanced and a decrease in students scoring Warning/Failing. Grades three, six, and ten showed a decline in student performance. Overall, nearly half of students in each grade scored below Proficient or Advanced.

Table III: SSCPS Science MCAS Test Results, 2004-2007

SC/TECH	Students Included	% Advanced	% Proficient	% Needs Improv.	% Warning/Failing	CPI
Grade 5						
2005	42	10	45	43	2	NA
2006	32	9	22	47	22	65.6
2007	41	5	37	56	2	77.4
Grade 8						
2005	38	0	42	39	18	NA
2006	39	0	28	54	18	64.7
2007	34	0	18	56	26	59.6
Grade 9						
2007	35	6	29	51	14	71.4

Because passage of a high school science MCAS examination is a graduation requirement beginning with the class of 2010, the Charter School Office has started to include science MCAS results in site visit reports. Student performance in the past two years has improved in grade five and declined in grade eight. In grade eight there has been an increase in the number of students scoring in the Warning/Failing category and no students scoring Advanced. In grade five there was a decrease in the percentage of students scoring in the Warning/Failing category and an increase in the number scoring Proficient. Thirty-five percent of students in grade nine scored Proficient or Advanced.

Is the school making adequate yearly progress in the aggregate and in all statistically significant subgroups?

Finding: SSCPS failed to make AYP in all areas.

Table IV shows the 2007 summary of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) determinations for SSCPS and its statistically significant demographic subgroups. AYP determinations are calculated by the state, in accordance with the standards of the No Child Left Behind Act. A school that makes AYP is considered “on track” to have all students score in the Proficient or Advanced categories on the MCAS exam by 2014. Table V shows detailed 2007 AYP data for SSCPS.

Table IV: 2007 AYP Determinations and Accountability Status for SSCPS

		Adequate Yearly Progress History									NCLB Accountability Status
		1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	
ELA	Aggregate	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No Status
	All Subgroups	-	-	-	-	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	
MATH	Aggregate	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Improvement Year 2 - Subgroups
	All Subgroups	-	-	-	-	No	Yes	No	No	No	

Table V: Detailed 2007 AYP Data for SSCPS

Student Group	(A) Participation		(B) Performance		(C) Improvement		(D) Grad Rate		AYP 2007
	Did at least 95% of students participate in MCAS?		Did student group meet or exceed state performance target?		Did student group meet or exceed its own improvement target?		Did student group meet 92% attendance (G1-8) or 55% graduation rate target (G9-12)?		
ELA	Met Target	Actual	Met Target	Actual	Met Target	Change from 2006	Met Target	Actual	AYP 2007
Aggregate	Yes	99	No	84.9	Yes	1.3	No	54.5	No
Lim. English Prof.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Special Education	Yes	100	No	73.1	Yes	10.0	No	28.6	No
Low Income	Yes	98	No	82.5	No	-0.7	Yes	57.1	No
Afr. Amer./Black	Yes	98	No	79.8	Yes	5.7	N<6	-	Yes
Asian or Pacif. Isl.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Hispanic	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Native American	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
White	Yes	99	Yes	86.4	Yes	1.5	No	52.9	No
Math	Met Target	Actual	Met Target	Actual	Met Target	Change from 2006	Met Target	Actual	AYP 2007
Aggregate	Yes	100	No	71.2	Yes	5.0	No	54.5	No
Lim. English Prof.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Special Education	Yes	100	No	44.8	Yes	8.7	No	28.6	No
Low Income	Yes	100	No	68.5	Yes	4.0	Yes	57.1	Yes
Afr. Amer./Black	Yes	98	No	69.6	Yes	7.6	N<6	-	Yes
Asian or Pacif. Isl.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Hispanic	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Native American	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
White	Yes	100	No	72.4	Yes	5.7	No	52.9	No

Largely due to a low graduation rate, SSCPS's data shows that the school did not make AYP for ELA in the aggregate or in any significant subgroups except for students identified as African American. The school also did not make AYP for mathematics in the aggregate or in significant subgroups except students identified as Low Income or African American. The school is identified for accountability purposes in math as Needs Improvement Year 2 for subgroups.

Administrators and members of the board of trustees noted that the low graduation rate was primarily due to the school's changing demographics. Both groups noted that since the school has relocated it has attracted more students that are at risk for dropping out of high school and that the graduation rate from 2006-07 was particularly low. Administrators stated that the graduation rate this year should be approximately 89% due to the fact that the school has made changes to its academic program and has not expanded its enrollment this school year. *Future visitors should note whether there is a change in the school's graduation rate.*

Has student performance been strong, or improved over time on other external and internal assessments?

Finding: SSCPS student performance on the TerraNova achievement test has been generally consistent as compared to the national average; however, scores for the past few years show fluctuation.

SSCPS administers the TerraNova achievement test as an additional external assessment and has partially met its Accountability Plan goal of its students scoring at or above a 50 Normal Curve Equivalent (NCE) total score in grades two through eight with the exception of grade six which had a total score of 49. Grades two, four, five, seven, and eight showed an increase in performance from the previous year. The school attributed variations in performance to fluctuations in enrollment and an increase in the number of students on Individual Education Plans specifically in grades three and six.

In 2006-07 SSCPS discontinued administration of the TerraNova test to its high school students due to the additional MCAS requirements for students in grades nine and ten. High school students are required to take the PSAT in grades ten and eleven as well as the SAT; administrators stated that these assessments provide an adequate amount of data on student performance. The school reported that in 2006-07 the mean SAT scores were 473 in reading, 435 in math, and 457 in writing.

Has the school met or is it making progress toward meeting the academic success goals set out in its Accountability Plan?

Finding: SSCPS has met the majority of performance standards related to the academic performance objectives included in its Accountability Plan.

SSCPS Accountability plan contains three student performance objectives each with specific performance standards for attainment. The objectives are:

Objective # 1: All students will work towards developing essential skills in initiative, critical thinking, teamwork, and communication.

Objective # 2: All students will master essential academic skills.

Objective #3: All students will demonstrate active engagement in their education.

The school reported making progress towards meeting most of the goals in its 2006-07 Annual Report. Observations by team members corroborated the information provide by the school in its annual report. The school did not meet two of its performance standards for its second objective. The school did not meet its goal of 100% of students completing required portfolio work and reported that 95% of students completed portfolios. In 2006-07 the school partially met the requirement for having 90% of students (in grades 3-10) meeting or exceeding the needs improvement score in ELA (97% of students) but did not in mathematics (81% of students).

The school reported meeting all standards for objective three except its 95% daily attendance standard. 2006-07 student attendance was reported to be 94%.

III. Organizational Viability

Does the school have an effective leadership and governance structure for carrying out the mission, vision, and educational philosophy of the school?

Finding: Stakeholders expressed strong satisfaction with the new interim executive director and the leadership she has provided.

Following the resignation of the executive director last spring, an interim director was hired by the board using a search process that sought input from parents and teachers. Board members, administrators, and teachers noted their satisfaction with the interim executive director's leadership of the school. Board members and administrators stated that the interim executive director's experience working in the public education system has provided a valuable perspective to the school. Teachers noted that even though she is new they feel that she is very supportive and approachable.

Administrators stated that the interim executive director has helped oversee a series of changes in the school's administrative practices and structure. This year, the school has placed an emphasis on recording best practices and using data to drive instruction. It has also expanded its induction and mentoring program for teachers and is planning to reorganize its structure for the 2008-09 school year to have a kindergarten through sixth grade principal and a seventh through twelfth grade principal.

Although the school community is very pleased with the performance of the interim executive director, board members stated that they would be unable to renew her contract for the upcoming school year because of her status as a retired public school administrator. The school does plan to keep her on staff serving in a reduced role. The board noted that they had started the search process for a permanent executive director, which was designed by a board member who serves as the superintendent of Hingham schools. To initiate the process, the board will hold focus groups with community members to develop criteria for hiring. A ten-person committee made up of parents, faculty, administrators, and students will interview candidates and narrow the applicant pool to seven or eight individuals at which point the board's personnel committee will take over and make a final recommendation to the entire board of trustees. *Future site visitors should inquire about the process and impact of hiring of a new executive director.*

How does the Board of Trustees provide oversight and leadership in key areas of the school, including academic achievement and fiscal planning?

Finding: The board of trustees provides effective oversight to the school.

The board is comprised of 16 members, including 13 voting members and a parent, student, and faculty representative. There are five committees: Development, Facilities, Finance, Governance, and Personnel. Committees and the board meet monthly. Board members described their role as providing oversight of school finances and policies as well as supervising and evaluating the executive director. Board members stated that they have developed clearer boundaries for their involvement in the daily operations of the school, and specifically, have gained the understanding that the staff sets the daily culture of the school and the board is

responsible for the long-range development of the school. Board members noted that in the past boundaries were less clear and that dealing with issues such as recess bullying and individual teacher competencies were now clearly understood to be outside the scope of their oversight.

Finding: The board of trustees and administration identified the school's long-term financial stability and its changing demographics as key areas of concern.

Board members noted that the school is currently financially stable. However, in the next few years it will face challenges as the school needs to "build out" the facility to meet its expanded enrollment. To expand the school facility, the board anticipates the need to significantly expand its fundraising base and go beyond its walls to seek funding sources. In February the school embarked on its annual campaign with the goal of doubling donations to raise \$100,000. The school is also preparing to launch a three million dollar capital campaign. To assist in fundraising, the school has started to recruit board members to serve on the school's affiliated foundation board and has set the goal of 100% participation from board members, administrators, faculty/staff and parents as well as significant participation from alumni.

Board members, administrators, teachers, and parents noted the school's changing demographics present several challenges for SSCPS. The first challenge is that more students attending the school are from districts that have a lower per pupil expenditure and present decreased revenue for the school. The second challenge is that more students are coming to the school from districts that have not met their educational needs and the school has had to adapt its curriculum and expand the range of services provided to students. The school reported an increase in the number of students in need of special education services, some of which were not identified before these students enrolled in the school.

The board noted that it would be developing a strategic plan to address these issues of fundraising, facilities, and changing demographics at its annual spring retreat. Members stated that the goal of the plan would be to develop specific long-range goals to guide the school's development. *Future site visitors should note the implementation of the strategic plan and its impacts.*

How does school leadership review effectiveness of the academic program and guide its improvement?

Finding: The school has created a school improvement plan that is focused on increasing student achievement.

As described earlier, the school has begun to develop a more systematic approach to using data to inform curriculum and instruction. The school has also created a school improvement plan for the 2007-08 school year that is being overseen by the school's administration. The plan, which includes thirteen different goals, focuses on specific aspects of instruction, curriculum, student achievement, facilities, and school culture. The school reports having implemented strategies to accomplish each goal. Measures for several goals, such as those that set specific targets for MCAS performance cannot yet be determined. *Future visitors should note the status and impact of the school's improvement plan.*

Is the school safe and are the physical facilities adequate for the program of the school?

Finding: Students and parents expressed satisfaction with the school's facility and describe the school as a safe learning environment.

Participants in the student and parent focus groups described the school as both physically and emotionally safe. Both groups described the school as a close-knit community; everyone knows each other and cares about each other. Students said the school creates an environment where self-expression is encouraged and students are not embarrassed or nervous about asking questions or seeking additional help. Students did state their desire for the school to have a central cafeteria or meeting area as well as outside sports fields.

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

Finding: The school reports that in 2006-07, 92% of the teaching faculty was designated as Highly Qualified. There is a range in the level of experience of the teaching staff.

Table V below indicates the years of experience for the school's teaching staff. Close to half the school's teachers (43%) are in their first or second year with the school, but most new hires have had prior teaching experience.

Table V: Teaching Years for SSCPS Teachers (N=44)

	1 Year	2 Years	3-5 years	6-10 years	11-20 years	20+ years
Total Teaching	3	3	9	15	10	4
Total Teaching at SSCPS	10	9	10	13	2	0

Teachers stated that the school provides support through its professional development and mentoring programs. Administrators stated that the school is planning to continue to provide professional development to teachers that are based upon the RBT model. Teachers can also seek outside professional development through stipend allocations of three hundred dollars for professional conferences and continuing education courses.

Administrators stated that the school's new teacher induction and mentoring program were revised and expanded this year. The program is overseen by one of the school's veteran teachers. Beginning teachers participate in an orientation and are matched with their mentors within the first two weeks of the school year. Beginning teachers meet with their level support team weekly, with the principal monthly, and with their mentor once every two weeks, acquiring in total a minimum of fifty hours annually of mentoring. Beginning teachers maintain a binder that organizes school handouts, professional literature, records of meetings, goal setting sheets, and reflective journal entries responding to questions about each monthly topic. Mentors support beginning teachers in becoming familiar with the school, refining their teaching practices, and better understanding their professional responsibilities as a reflective educator. Beginning teachers are formally observed by a qualified administrator and their mentor. They are assessed by the South Shore Charter Public School Teacher Observation Form that is based on Department of Education standards, and on standards outlined in *The Skillful Teacher* by Jon Saphier and Robert Gower. Mentors and beginning teachers receive release time in order to observe in other classrooms, engage in mentoring activities, and co-teach. In the spring of 2008, the school is planning on having new teachers and mentors evaluate the program and make

recommendations for improvement. *Future site visitors should inquire about the development and impact of the school's mentoring program.*

The school's assistant principal and principals perform all formal teacher evaluations. The evaluations consist of classroom observations, formal meetings such as annual goal setting with the principal, and other informal sources of information on student performance and faculty decorum. Classroom observations are accompanied with a pre and post-observation conference in which overarching goals and the lesson are discussed. All new teachers are formally observed at least two times a year and all other teachers are formally observed once a year.

Are school community members satisfied with the performance of the school?

Finding: Community members express satisfaction with the performance of the school.

All stakeholders expressed satisfaction with the school and the supportive environment it provides. Parents stated that the school challenges each student to be successful and works to develop students that have a variety of skills and experiences. Students noted that the school creates a close community where they have a voice in school decisions and they learn concepts and skills in a manner that is applicable to real life settings. Teachers stated that the school provides a supportive and collegial environment and is working to address the challenges it faces.

Has the school met or is it making progress toward meeting the organizational viability goals set out in its Accountability Plan?

Finding: The school has met the majority of the organizational viability goals in its Accountability Plan.

SSCPS's Accountability plan contains two organizational viability performance objectives; the second objective contains specific performance standards for attainment. The objectives are:

Objective # 1: SSCPS will maintain financial solvency and stability.

Objective # 2: SSCPS will demonstrate itself to be a viable organization.

Based on information provided in 2006-07 Annual Report and information provided to the site visit team, SSCPS met the majority of the assessment measures for organizational viability. The area of fundraising and maintaining facilities is an area identified by the school as an area for improvement. Although the school was able to expand its facilities with the addition of a Level I classroom and a high school science lab, board members and administrators noted that further development of the building and the related fundraising is a top priority for the school.

Conclusion

Is the school becoming the school it promised to be in its charter?

SSCPS is a school in transition. As the school progresses through its thirteenth year of operation it has showed dedication to working towards its mission of providing an educational experience that respects the learning styles of individual students and provides a project-based, experiential learning program. All stakeholders seem well aware of the challenges the school faces with regard to changes in leadership, student demographics, and the development of school facilities. Under the guidance of the school's interim executive director, both the board of trustees and the

school administration have worked to develop strategies to meet these challenges. A central focus of these strategies is upon student achievement and the development of a common understanding of effective teaching strategies. Administrators are guiding a refinement of the school's project and workshop model and are working to document teachers' best practices. The school has implemented multiple strategies to address the challenges facing the school; future visitors to the school should note the coordination and implementation of the school's efforts to improve student achievement and long-term financial stability.