

Year Two Site Visit Report

Four Rivers Charter Public School
Greenfield, MA

June 14, 2005

Four Rivers Charter Public School (Four Rivers) opened in fall 2003 serving 64 students in grades 7 and 8. The school added students in Grade 9 in 2004, and plans to add an additional grade each year. The school is envisioned as a full middle and high school for Franklin County, and when fully enrolled, will serve 192 students in grades 7 through 12. Four Rivers' mission states that "Four Rivers Charter School is dedicated to educating young people for lives of learning and service. The school offers a rigorous academic program aligned with the Massachusetts curriculum frameworks and an emphasis on character development for moral and social responsibility. Three central themes – nature, technology and community – pervade teaching and learning at the school, engaging students and teachers in a fundamental question of our times: how do we find the healthy, fruitful, interrelationship of the natural world, technology in its many forms, and the human community? The school works closely with parents and seeks both to serve and to learn from the many resources of Franklin County." The school was founded as an Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound school, and draws much of its school design and operation from this national comprehensive school reform model.

In documents provided to the site visit team, Four Rivers reported the following demographic makeup of its 102 students: 60% of students are male, and 40% are female. 96% of students are Caucasian, 1% are Hispanic, 1% are Pacific Islander, and 2% are Asian American. No students are Limited English Proficient, and 21% of students receive special education services. 20% of the student population qualify to receive free- or reduced-priced meals.

The following participants conducted the site visit on April 27, 2005:

- Sally Bachofer, Coordinator of Accountability, MA DOE Charter School Office
- Dan Kirsch, Director of Development, University of Massachusetts Amherst School of Education
- Dan Klatz, Education Coordinator, Hilltown Cooperative Charter School, Haydenville, MA
- Tony Siddall, Assistant Coordinator of Accountability, MA DOE Charter School Office

Before the visit, the site team reviewed the 2003-2004 Annual Report for the charter school and its current accountability plan. On site, the team reviewed curricular information, a teacher roster, Board materials, and other information provided by the school. The team conducted group and individual interviews with Trustees, administrators, teachers, parents, and students, and observed classes.

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 Commonwealth decide whether to renew its charter. The focus of the visit is on three central areas of inquiry:

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

The team's findings and the evidence supporting these findings are detailed below.

1. Academic Program Success

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

Finding: Four Rivers is at the early stages of creating and documenting its curriculum. Curriculum development is a very teacher intensive process, and the school is deep into thinking through the balance of using foundational documents and the fluid nature of a teacher created and teacher driven curriculum. The leadership team, Board of Trustees and teachers at the school all described curriculum creation and development as guided by a triangle of influences – the mission statement of the school, the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks, and the Expeditionary Learning model design methodology. Four Rivers teachers have developed a few learning expeditions, and sets of linked projects with resulting products. Questions of what to teach and when to teach it are shaped by the three guiding influences, and teachers described formal planning as well as on-going decision making over the past two school years as the school community works to determine a formal scope and sequence of the curriculum. School leaders and teachers spoke of emphasis on real world questions and issues to guide student learning. At this point, teachers informally track the coverage of standards and the Frameworks. Due to the teacher intensive and project based nature of building the curriculum for the school, and the opportunity to be flexible with the documentation and delivery of curriculum, the school is determining the balance of formal and informal expectations for teaching and learning at the school. The school director shared his intent for the school to codify its curriculum by mapping the core academic subjects through the grades and by formal documentation of learning expeditions as foundational elements of the school's curriculum. Future site visit teams should investigate the school's progress in this area.

Finding: Four Rivers provides a number of internal and external resources to support teachers as they plan, build, improve, and deliver the school's curriculum. Internally, the school schedule provides professional development and curriculum planning time for teachers. A summer planning institute provided two weeks of focused and structured time for teachers to meet to plan and refine curriculum. Four Rivers provided three additional professional development days at the end of the school year for de-brief and planning. From September to June, the faculty meets formally on a weekly basis, and participates in one Wednesday half-day each month of structured professional development. Six additional Wednesday half-days and one or two full days of professional development and planning are spread through the year. The structure of and expectation for the content of the Wednesday half day professional development and planning times are developed in response to faculty needs and the school's goals. The school director reported that it was up to teachers how to use time to plan and collaborate during the week.

The school director supervises and coaches teachers through frequent formal and informal observations of their teaching practice. The leadership team described this system of evaluation as needs focused for teachers, with the intent of targeting areas of improvement and providing support for those areas of need. The school is working on developing a formal model of evaluation. The school director and teachers are using the Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) publication "Qualities of Effective Teachers" to provide a temporary framework for formalized evaluation and to guide expectations for teaching at Four

Rivers. The assistant director provides program and structural support to teachers as they plan and implement the school's curriculum.

Through its affiliation with Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound, Four Rivers receives about 18 full days of school designer time each year. School designers are essentially school coaches who work with teachers as they plan learning expeditions and serve as a resource to model Expeditionary Learning teaching methodology. Teachers and staff have access to the national Expeditionary Learning network, including the opportunity to participate at the network's annual National Conference, attend site seminars at other network schools, and share nationally distributed learning expeditions, projects and product ideas. In addition, teachers report that although confusing at times, they have used some of the Expeditionary Learning curriculum tools in planning and documenting learning expeditions. Four Rivers is still in the process of developing the systems and criteria to ensure that learning expeditions are of consistently high quality and meet the school's needs as foundational elements of the curriculum. The school hopes to continue to document learning expeditions that can be replicated in the future, to reduce teachers' planning workload.

Finding: In all observed classrooms, teachers created an environment that facilitated teaching and learning. Members of the site visit team visited every class taking place during an approximately 75 minute block on the morning of the visit. In all classrooms observed by the site visit team, teachers maintained an environment that was focused on learning. All students were engaged in academic work, and student behavior was managed effectively. During classroom visits, members of the site visit team saw evidence of student focused and student driven learning.

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

Internal assessments

Finding: Four Rivers has created a first draft of a preliminary internal assessment system, and is now working on defining and refining components of this system so that teachers can use it to evaluate student progress toward defined student learning objectives. Teachers reported and the team observed that the internal assessment system at Four Rivers is based on a number of formal and informal tools and processes. Teachers use informal check-ins for understanding throughout their lessons. Student produced and teacher produced rubrics guide the production and assessment of student work. Students displayed a nuanced understanding of the role and purpose of rubrics. Students understand expectations for high quality work at Four Rivers and know that rubrics serve the dual purpose of guiding documents for their work as well as tools for assessment. Student work is collected in portfolios, and school leaders, teachers and students all spoke of the guiding documents (rubrics and portfolio criteria) that set clear expectations for the type and quality of work in students' portfolios. The site visit team confirmed the quality of the guiding documents based on a review of the existing curriculum documents and guiding documents for internal assessments. The leadership team described their intent for student work portfolios to transition into passage portfolios, and ultimately serve as exit portfolios for all students. Currently, students and families receive formal progress reports three times a year. Students lead teacher-family conferences in the middle of the first and second trimesters, at which time progress is reviewed and goals for growth are agreed upon. These reports evaluate

student learning in number form, and provide narrative comments from teachers, following a common format and using common definitions. The year 3 site visit team should spend time reviewing the progress of defining and refining the internal assessment system, specifically its codification across the school and data from progress reports and student work portfolios.

External assessments

Finding: Although Four Rivers only has MCAS test results from its first year of operation, students have demonstrated a high level of proficiency on the Grade 7 ELA exam and a moderate level of proficiency on the Grade 8 math exam. Table I summarizes the MCAS performance of Four Rivers students.

Table I: Four Rivers MCAS Results by Performance Category

	Students tested	% Advanced	% Proficient	% Needs Improvement	% Warning
ELA – Grade 7					
2004	32	3	69	25	3
Math – Grade 8					
2004	32	9	28	56	6

Grade 7 ELA: On the 2004 administration of this exam, 72 percent of students demonstrated proficiency (by scoring in the Proficient or Advanced performance categories), and 97 percent scored in the top three performance categories.

Grade 8 math: On the 2004 administration of this exam, 94 percent of students scored in the top three performance categories. Thirty-seven percent of the students demonstrated proficiency (by scoring in the Proficient or Advanced performance categories), and 56 percent scored in the Needs Improvement category. Only limited conclusions about school performance can be drawn from one year of testing results. Nonetheless, it will be important for the school to move students from the Needs Improvement and Warning performance categories into the Advanced and Proficient performance categories to keep pace with Adequate Yearly Progress expectations for the school.

Table II presents the Cycle III (2003 and 2004 exam years) performance ratings and the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) determinations in ELA and math for Four Rivers. AYP is determined by the DOE for each school in the state, based on whether the school is on track to have all of its students score in the Proficient and Advanced performance categories at all grade levels in ELA and math by the year 2014. Currently, Four Rivers has been rated “high” in ELA, meaning that students in the school have performed well above students in the state on the Grade 7 ELA exam. In math, the school received a rating of “moderate,” meaning that students in the school performed about the same as students in the state on the Grade 8 math exam. Four Rivers does not have an “accountability status,” meaning that the school is not currently subject to any consequences as part of the Massachusetts accountability system.

Table II: Four Rivers Cycle III Accountability Report

English Language Arts						
<u>Cycle III Performance Rating:</u>	HIGH		Performance Data:	<u>State Target</u>	<u>Cycle III CPI</u>	
				75.6	87.5	
<u>Cycle III Improvement Rating:</u>			Improvement Data:	<u>Baseline CPI</u>	<u>Gain Target</u>	<u>On Target Range</u>
						-
<u>Cycle III AYP (Aggregate):</u>	2003	2004	<u>Accountability Status:</u>	No Status		
	N/A	Yes				
Mathematics						
<u>Cycle III Performance Rating:</u>	MODERATE		Performance Data:	<u>State Target</u>	<u>Cycle III CPI</u>	
				60.8	70.3	
<u>Cycle III Improvement Rating:</u>			Improvement Data:	<u>Baseline CPI</u>	<u>Gain Target</u>	<u>On Target Range</u>
						-
<u>Cycle III AYP (Aggregate):</u>	2003	2004	<u>Accountability Status:</u>	No Status		
	N/A	Yes				

Terra Nova: Four Rivers administers the Terra Nova Basic Multiple Assessments in Reading, Language, and Mathematics to grade 7 and 8 students in the fall of 2003 and in June 2004. All students took the test again in the fall of 2004. The school plans to continue to administer this test in the fall and spring of each year. Results are summarized and analyzed below.

Table III: Change in Mean Terra Nova NCE, Fall 2003 to Spring 2004

	Reading	Language	Mathematics
Grade 7	-0.3	-1.3	+0.4
Grade 8	-2.5	+6.0	-0.8

Table III shows that Grade 7 students declined slightly in Reading skills and in Language as measured by the Terra Nova, and improved the mean score slightly mathematics sections of the exam. Grade 8 students declined in Reading and math skills, but improved significantly in Language skills.

Reporting on progress towards meeting Accountability Plan goals:

Four Rivers received approval for its accountability plan in September 2004. In this report, this approved plan is used to report on progress towards meeting goals and indicators set by the school. As the school is in its second year, it does not yet enroll students at all grades in its proposed grade 7 through 12 configuration and is in the process of improving internal assessment measures, the school does not yet have evidence for all indicators in this plan. In addition, the school is in the process of establishing baseline data from a number of sources in order to determine appropriate pacing of expectations for student academic improvement. Evidence of progress towards meeting the goals outlined in a school's Accountability Plan is an integral part of the renewal process, significantly impacting the recommendation of the Commissioner and

Board of Education of charter renewal, renewal with conditions, or non-renewal of the school's charter.

Related to student academic achievement:

Accountability Plan Goal 1: English Language Arts - Writing:

Students at Four Rivers Charter School will be able to communicate clearly in writing for different purposes and audiences.

Indicators	Progress toward meeting the goal	Has the goal been met?
<p>MCAS: 70% of students who have attended Four Rivers Charter School (FRCS) for at least two years will attain Proficiency on the ELA MCAS in the 10th grade, and at least 90% will pass in the 10th grade.</p> <p>MCAS: Students in Grade 10 who have attended FRCS for at least two years will achieve an average score on the 10th grade ELA MCAS at or above the average scores of the Franklin County schools from which these students are drawn. (Note: The average scores of the sending schools will be a weighted mean.)</p>	<p>When Spring 2005 Grade 7 ELA results are released, the school can begin to track improvement trends for each successive incoming class.</p>	<p>Cannot determine, as Four Rivers does not yet have any Grade 10 students.</p>
<p>Terra Nova: Students in grades 7, 8, and 9 will have an average improvement annually of 4 Normal Curve Equivalent (NCE) points in Reading on the Terra Nova Basic Multiple Assessment.</p>	<p>Currently, the school only has results from fall 2003 and spring 2004 testing of its first two cohorts of students.</p>	<p>Partially met: Last year, from fall to spring testing, Grade 7 students' NCS scores in Reading decreased slightly and Grade 8 students' NCE scores increased dramatically.</p>
<p>Passage Portfolio: 90% of students will successfully meet the requirements in the Reading component of Passage Portfolios at 8th and 10th grades.</p>	<p>The school reports that passage portfolio requirements will be fully implemented this school year.</p>	<p>Cannot determine, but the school reports that, against simplified portfolio requirements in writing, between 85 percent and 90 percent of grade 7 and 8 students met the requirements (2003-2004 Annual Report, page 13).</p>
<p>Progress Reports: 95% of all students will show improvement in at least one of the core standards in Writing on their Progress Reports over the course of the three marking periods each year.</p>		<p>Cannot determine, as the school has yet to quantify progress on Progress Reports between marking periods.</p>

Accountability Plan Goal 2: English Language Arts - Reading:
Students at Four Rivers Charter School will be able to effectively comprehend, analyze, and interpret literature and non-fiction texts.

Indicators	Progress toward meeting the goal	Has the goal been met?
<p>MCAS: 70% of students who have attended FRCS for at least two years will attain Proficiency on the ELA MCAS in the 10th grade, and at least 90% will pass in the 10th grade.</p> <p>MCAS: Students in Grade 10 who have attended FRCS for at least two years will achieve an average score on the 10th grade ELA MCAS at or above the average scores of the Franklin County schools from which these students are drawn.</p>	<p>When Spring 2005 Grade 7 ELA results are released, the school can begin to track improvement trends for each successive incoming class.</p>	<p>Cannot determine, as Four Rivers does not yet have any Grade 10 students.</p>
<p>Terra Nova: Students in grades 7, 8, and 9 will have an average improvement annually of 4 Normal Curve Equivalent (NCE) points in Language on the Terra Nova Basic Multiple Assessment.</p>	<p>Currently, the school only has results from fall 2003 and spring 2004 testing of its first two cohorts of students.</p>	<p>Partially met: Last year, from fall to spring testing, Grade 7 students' NCS scores in Writing decreased slightly and Grade 8 students' NCE scores decreased moderately.</p>
<p>Passage Portfolio: 90% of students will successfully meet the requirements in the Reading component of Passage Portfolios at 8th and 10th grades.</p>	<p>The school reports that passage portfolio requirements will be fully implemented this school year.</p>	<p>Cannot determine, but the school reports that, against simplified portfolio requirements in writing, 90 percent of grade 7 and 8 students met the requirements (2003-2004 Annual Report, page 14).</p>
<p>Progress Reports: 95% of all students will show improvement in at least one of the core standards in Reading on their Progress Reports over the course of the three marking periods each year.</p>		<p>Cannot determine, as the school has yet to quantify progress on Progress Reports between marking periods.</p>

Accountability Plan Goal 3: Math:

Students at Four Rivers Charter School will be able to apply mathematical knowledge and skills to solve problems.

Indicators	Progress toward meeting the goal	Has the goal been met?
<p>MCAS: 60% of students who have attended FRCS for at least two years will attain Proficiency on the math MCAS in the 10th grade, and at least 90% will pass in the 10th grade.</p> <p>MCAS: Students in grades 8 and 10 who have attended FRCS for at least two years will achieve an average score on the 10th grade math MCAS at or above the average scores of the Franklin County schools from which these students are drawn.</p>	<p>When Spring 2005 Grade 8 math results are released, the school can begin to track improvement trends for each successive incoming class.</p>	<p>Cannot determine, as Four Rivers does not yet have any Grade 10 students.</p>
<p>Terra Nova: Students in grades 7, 8, and 9 will have an average improvement annually of 4 Normal Curve Equivalent (NCE) points in Math on the Terra Nova Basic Multiple Assessment.</p>	<p>Currently, the school only has results from fall 2003 and spring 2004 testing of its first two cohorts of students.</p>	<p>Partially met: Last year, from fall to spring testing, Grade 7 students' NCS scores in math increased slightly and Grade 8 students' NCE scores decreased slightly.</p>
<p>Passage Portfolio: 90% of students will successfully meet the requirements in the Math component of Passage Portfolios at 8th and 10th grades.</p>	<p>The school reports that passage portfolio requirements will be fully implemented this school year.</p>	<p>Cannot determine, but the school reports that against simplified portfolio requirements in math, 80 percent of Grade 7 and 81 percent of Grade 8 students met the requirements (2003-2004 Annual Report, page 15).</p>
<p>Progress Reports: 95% of all students will show improvement in at least one of the core standards in Math on their Progress Reports over the course of the three marking periods each year.</p>		<p>Cannot determine, as the school has yet to aggregate progress on Progress Reports between marking periods.</p>

Accountability Plan Goal 4: Science:

Students at Four Rivers Charter School will be able to apply scientific knowledge and methods to solve problems and conduct experiments and research.

Indicators	Progress toward meeting the goal	Has the goal been met?
MCAS: Students in grades 8 and 10 who have attended FRCS for at least two years will achieve an average score on the 8 th and 10 th grade Science MCAS at or above the average scores of the Franklin County schools from which these students are drawn.		Cannot determine, as Four Rivers does not yet have any Grade 10 students.
Research: 95% of students will successfully complete a Science research project related to the school themes and of portfolio quality annually.		Cannot determine as the school has not yet determined criteria for meeting this goal.
Passage Portfolio: 90% of students will successfully meet the requirements in the Science component of Passage Portfolios at 8 th and 10 th grades.	The school reports that passage portfolio requirements will be fully implemented this school year.	Cannot determine, but the school reports that, against simplified portfolio requirements in science, 90 percent of Grade 7 and 75 percent of Grade 8 students met the requirements (2003-2004 Annual Report, page 15).
Progress Reports: 95% of all students will show improvement in at least one of the core standards in Science on their Progress Reports over the course of the three marking periods each year.		Cannot determine, as the school has yet to quantify progress on Progress Reports between marking periods.

Accountability Plan Goal 5: Social Studies/History:

Students at Four Rivers Charter School will be able to apply historical insights and research skills to better understand United States and world history.

Indicators	Progress toward meeting the goal	Has the goal been met?
MCAS: Students who have attended FRCS for at least two years will achieve an average score on the 10 th or 11 th grade Social Studies/History MCAS at or above the average scores of the Franklin County schools from which these students are drawn.		Cannot determine, as MCAS is not yet administered in Social Studies/History.
Research: 95% of students will successfully complete a Social Studies/History research project related to the school themes and of portfolio quality annually.		Cannot determine as the school has not yet determined criteria for meeting this goal.
Passage Portfolio: 90% of students will successfully meet the requirements in the Social Studies/History component of Passage Portfolios at 8 th and 10 th grades.	The school reports that passage portfolio requirements will be fully implemented this school year.	Cannot determine, but the school reports that, against simplified portfolio requirements in Social Studies/History, 87 percent of Grade 7 and 84 percent of Grade 8 students met the requirements (2003-2004 Annual Report, page 16).
Progress Reports: 95% of all students will show improvement in at least one of the core standards in Social Studies/History on their Progress Reports over the course of the three marking periods each year.		Cannot determine, as the school has yet to quantify progress on Progress Reports between marking periods.

2. Organizational Viability

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

Finding: The Four Rivers community shares a common understanding of and commitment to the school's mission. All stakeholders expressed a common understanding of the school's mission, based on the mission statement of the school, the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks, and the Expeditionary Learning model design methodology (see page 2). Mission elements of nature, community and technology were mentioned by the school administration, teachers and Board members. A strong commitment to character development was also apparent to the site visit team.

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

Finding: Four Rivers provides a safe learning environment. All stakeholders agreed that the school provides a safe environment for children.

Finding: Four Rivers is in a strong position regarding its facility. Four Rivers is located in a converted farmhouse and specially constructed classroom building on a historic farm in Greenfield. The school, in partnership with its non-profit educational foundation, has planned for and prioritized the physical needs of the school community since the school's development and planning phase. In the fall of 2004, the school secured financing to purchase the existing structures and in the spring of 2005 further financing was secured to construct and purchase permanent facilities and land for the high school program.

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

Finding: Four Rivers employs a mix of teachers with extensive teaching experience and teachers who are new to the profession. The school experienced excellent retention of staff between Year 1 and Year 2, with all full-time faculty returning in August 2004 for the school's second year. Tables IV and V summarize how long Four Rivers teachers have worked at the school, and how many years teaching experience they have. These tables draw information from the "Four Rivers Staff Roster, 2004-2005" which was provided to the site visit team by the school, and includes the eleven teachers teaching math, English, Social Studies, Science, Spanish, and who serve as learning specialists.

Table IV: Teaching Experience of Four Rivers teachers

Years teaching	1-2	3-5	6-10	11-20
# of teachers	2	1	5	3

Table V: Years Spent Teaching at Four Rivers

Years at Four Rivers	1	2	3
# of teachers	6	5	0

For the 2004-2005 school year Four Rivers reported that three of its eleven teachers were "highly qualified" in the subject area they teach according to the standards of the federal No Child Left Behind Act, meaning that they hold at least a bachelor's degree and have demonstrated subject area competency. Six teachers teach two subjects and are, at this time, "highly qualified" in one subject, but have not yet demonstrated subject area competency in *both* subjects, as is required in order to be considered "highly qualified." One part-time teacher is teaching outside her subject area, and one teaching assistant is Certified by the Commonwealth. The school reports that the teachers not yet classified as "highly qualified" in more than one core academic area, will be by the end of the 2005-2006 school year.

The issue of middle school teachers covering more than one core academic area and the challenges this presents were acknowledged by school leadership and teachers in focus groups. The school is well aware of the challenge and has addressed it at the high school level by planning to assign high school teachers only a single subject to teach and be responsible for. At the middle school level, Four Rivers has made efforts to support teachers who are responsible for split subjects to take the steps necessary to gain "highly qualified" status in all subject areas they are responsible for.

Finding: Four Rivers provides multiple pathways for teacher professional development. Four Rivers offers teachers a variety of resources for professional development. Teachers have

significant time for planning and collaborative working meetings, and work with the school leadership team on an ongoing basis to develop curriculum and discuss instructional techniques. Teachers also took part in a summer institute provided by the school, which was focused on curriculum development and learning about the Expeditionary Learning model. Four Rivers provides ongoing professional development from a variety of consultants, and teachers and staff have access to the national Expeditionary Learning network, including participating at the network's annual National Conference, attending site seminars at other network schools, and sharing nationally distributed learning expeditions, projects and product ideas.

Finding: Four Rivers is in the process of developing a formal evaluation system for teachers. As noted above on pages 2-3, the school director supervises and coaches teachers through frequent formal and informal observations of their teaching practice. The leadership team described this system of evaluation as "needs focused" for teachers, meaning that the system is intended to target areas in need of improvement and provide support for those areas of need. The school is working on developing a formal model to guide teacher evaluation. The school director and teachers are using the Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) book "Qualities of Effective Teachers" and Expeditionary Learning Core Practice Benchmarks to provide a temporary framework for formalized evaluation and to guide expectations for teaching at Four Rivers.

Accountability Plan Goal 7: Faculty

Four Rivers Charter School will retain qualified, committed and effective full-time teachers.

- The school will retain annually 75% of the full-time teachers who have received good or outstanding evaluations and who are able to continue teaching at Four Rivers Charter School.
- In an annual survey, at least 75% of the parents responding will report satisfaction with the effectiveness of the faculty in areas of academic challenge, support, and communication.

Goal met. Four Rivers successfully retained all of its full-time core subject area teachers between Year 1 and Year 2. In addition, over 75 percent of parents responding to the 2004 Parent Survey either strongly agreed or agreed with feeling satisfied with the effectiveness of the faculty in areas of academic challenge, support, and communication.

Does the school have an effective governance structure and management system for carrying out the purposes and objectives of the school?

Finding: The Four Rivers Charter Public School's Board of Trustees has developed and implemented strong procedural elements to guide its work and ensure effectiveness as the first line of accountability to the school's charter. The Board is comprised of twelve members, including the ex-officio position of the school Director. Board members have experience in teaching and learning, finance, real estate and development, law, and human resources. During the focus group with the Board, members described the intentional nature of drawing from the local community when building the original Board and in recruiting potential Board members. Job descriptions for Board committees exist and guide the area work of the committees on Facilities/Finance, Trustees, Personnel Policies, and Development. These committees are complimented by task forces focused on Accountability and the development of the high school

program. The Board has developed an eighteen-month Action Plan, broken into six month components with goals for all areas of oversight. This Action Plan directs the Board's work, and Board members reported to the site visit team that they continuously revise their work and update the priorities of the school based on a long-term vision of viability. The Board holds an annual retreat designed to reflect on and strengthen their work. In addition, the Board has held "mini-workshops" in areas such as finance and the Expeditionary Learning model to build member's knowledge in areas of education. The school's connection with Expeditionary Learning has influenced Board practice. Members of the Board described how the EL design principles inform their work, and find their way into each Board meeting during opening readings and in prioritizing support for the academic program. The job description for the school Director is clear and the Board performs an annual evaluation with a self-evaluation component as well as direct examination of attainment of goals. The school's financial health and the acquisition and improvement of school facilities have been a strong focus of the Board during the planning year and the first two years of operation. The Board reported that it carefully balances risk with the school's academic needs when making decisions that impact the school's finances.

Finding: The Four Rivers Charter Public School's Board of Trustees exercises an appropriate level of oversight in guiding and managing the school. During the focus group interview, the Board characterized itself as a Board that sets policy, drawing conclusions and taking action based on a broad set of indicators of the health and viability of the school. Board members were able to speak knowledgeably about various elements of the school's program, and appear to be well-informed about many aspects of the school's performance. The Board relies on the school Director and the Director of Operations to synthesize information and present recommendations in the best interest of the academic program of the school. The Board monitors the success of the school through formal, monthly, reports from Board committees, the school Director, and members of the school community. The Board was actively involved in creating the school's Accountability Plan, and monitors student's academic performance against the Plan's goals through examining standardized test results, internal assessment information, attending student work exhibitions, and hearing vignettes of the daily life at the school presented by the school Director. Board members explained that they viewed themselves as a policy making and governing body, and allowed the school Director to be responsible for the "how" of school and the implementation of teaching and learning.

Accountability Plan Goal 8: Board

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

- The Board will meet monthly and maintain membership consistent with the by-laws.
- The Board will set goals annually with the school director and will evaluate the director based on those goals.
- The Board will oversee the Accountability Plan through semi-annual reports from the director.
- The Board will develop, implement and assess a Board Action Plan annually.

Goal met. Through the focus group interviews with the Board and school leadership team, the site visit team gathered affirmative evidence that the Board of Trustees has

built sound policies, monitored the school's progress, and has planned effectively for the needs of the school.

Accountability Plan Goal 9: Finances

Four Rivers Charter School will be a fiscally sound and solvent organization.

- Annual expenditures, excluding depreciation, will not exceed annual revenues.
- The school will attain a cash reserve equivalent to three months' operating expenses by the end of the 5th year.
- The school will meet the annual fundraising goals established by the Board of Trustees in the annual approved operating budget.
- The annual independent audit for Four Rivers Charter School will report no major findings.

Goal met. According to the most recent audited financial statement (FY04 audit) the school increased their net assets by nearly \$200,000 from FY03 to FY04; had a healthy current assets to liability ratio; and raised more than \$250,000 in private funding from both outside sources and the Four Rivers Educational Foundation. The audit did contain a finding regarding documentation around a lease amendment, and the school's management has agreed to address this issue.

Finding: School leaders have been thoughtful in identifying areas of need and supporting teachers in making changes to address these areas of need. The leadership team consists of a team of three, the school Director, Assistant Director, and Director of Operations. Two of the leadership team are founders of the school. The team appears to work well together, and the members of the team described a comprehensive approach to addressing challenges facing the school. This approach is guided by a commitment to analyzing how issues affect teaching and learning, determining what support teachers need to resolve the issue, and allocating resources to address provide this support. The team reported that they are responsible for the daily management of the school, while the Board is mainly responsible for monitoring the success of the school and setting policy. The site visit team observed, and the school director confirmed, that Four Rivers has successfully hired teachers who are highly skilled and whose teaching style is a good fit for the school's educational philosophy and the needs of its students.

Finding: School leaders have identified current challenges that the school faces and challenges that they anticipate as the school expands. Together with the Board of Trustees, the leadership team appears to be thoughtfully engaged and self-reflective about the school's successes, shortcomings and future challenges. During the focus group interviews with the leadership team and the Board of Trustees, school leaders identified a number of challenges and projects that face the school, including the need to:

- Develop and codify systems for decision making;
- Develop and codify systems for formalizing implementation and tracking of curriculum;
- Recruit and retain qualified staff who are a good fit for the school;
- Clarify the vision for the high school program, including the challenge of making the program feel distinct from the middle school;
- Continue to work on school climate and culture, so that the way that Four Rivers does school is carried by the students as well as the adults;

- Continue to be pro-active about the financial situation of the school, including monitoring the stability of the charter school funding formula;
- Encourage the development and success of the school’s non-profit foundation; and
- Continue to balance the financial needs of the school (including teacher support and facilities) with financial risk (spending for school improvement).

The above challenges and projects were echoed by teachers at the school during a focus group session. It was clear to the site visit team that the school understood the importance of anticipating and planning for upcoming challenges, and that the entire school community had a common understanding of the areas of concentration for the school.

Are parents satisfied with the performance of the school?

Finding: The parents with whom the site visit team spoke expressed strong satisfaction with the school. Family members in this focus group were highly satisfied with the school, praising in particular the school’s commitment to its mission of providing active and engaging learning experiences for children. Parents also appreciated the school’s small size, and the efforts teachers and administrators make to communicate frequently about each child’s learning and educational needs. Parents reported that administrators frequently solicit input from families on important decisions the school makes.

Is enrollment stable?

Finding: Four Rivers has maintained full enrollment in each of its first two operating years. In the school’s 2003-2004 Annual Report, it summarized student turnover data for the first year of operation. Two students left during the 2003-2004 school year, and eight students left the school over the summer and did not re-enroll for the 2004-2005 school year (2003-2004 Annual Report, page 24). In materials provided to the site visit team, Four Rivers reports that as of March 31, 2005, 102 students were enrolled in grades 7 through 9. This school year, one student left and that seat was replaced immediately with a student off the wait-list. Board members and school leaders reported that the school does not do much advertising, and that they believe that the reputation of the school has spread by “word-of-mouth,” and that demand for the school is high as evidenced by the size of the waiting list.

Accountability Plan Goal 6: Enrollment:
Four Rivers Charter School will be fully enrolled each year.

Indicators	Progress toward meeting the goal	Has the goal been met?
The school will reach its goal of growth by 32 students/year to full enrollment in 2007-08.	The school has expanded for the 2005-2006 school year and is fully pre-enrolled.	Cannot determine as the school has yet to reach full grade configuration and enrollment, but the school appears to be on-track towards meeting this goal.
90% percent of the students eligible and able to return to Four Rivers Charter School will reenroll for the following school year.	For 2004-2005, eight of 64 students did not return; 88% of the students eligible and able to return to Four Rivers, did.	Cannot determine as the school only has one year of reenrollment data. Any future site visit teams should evaluate whether this objective is met for subsequent classes.

Applications each year will exceed the number of places available by 25%.		Goal met. In 2003-2004, demand to available seats was 117/64 (2003-2004 Annual Report, page 23). For 2004-2005, the school pre-enrolled 138 students with 64 students on the wait list (March 31, 2005, Pre-enrollment report).
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3. Faithfulness to the Terms of the Charter

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

Finding: Four Rivers received a Coordinated Program Review (CPR) from the Program Quality Assurance (PQA) division of the DOE the week of April 4, 2005. The review evaluated the school's compliance with federal and state requirements for special education, limited English proficient students, civil rights, and other areas. The CPR report has not yet been issued by the Department. However, preliminary findings from the visit suggest that the school is largely in compliance in all areas covered by the review and, is implementing highly effective programs for special education students.

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

*Finding: Four Rivers has made numerous efforts to introduce members of the local community to the elements of its educational program. The school is in the early stages of identifying specific best practices and formally sharing them. The school's 2003-2004 Annual Report described these community outreach activities: The final product from a Grade 8 Community Cultivators learning expedition, a book entitled *A Little More Than Just People*, was shared with the local community and with Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound; and *The Four Rivers Charter School Field Guide to Being a Teen in Franklin County* was produced in conjunction with a Grade 7 learning expedition, and was distributed to the Franklin County Community Coalition for Teens (2003-2004 Annual Report, page 33). Four Rivers has hosted a diverse array of community members and leaders to visit the school at Community Open Houses, and an Exhibition Night. The Board of Trustees and school leaders reported to the site visit team that they have a cordial relationship with Greenfield Public Schools and that they are working on building connections with the community college and other community organizations. In addition, the school has shared its business practices with other start-up charter schools in Massachusetts. It will be important for the school to demonstrate to any future site visit teams that it has identified specific best practices or models for replication and shared them with surrounding schools.*

Is the school achieving or making progress toward its accountability plan goals?

Finding: Four Rivers has written a rigorous and measurable Accountability Plan, and reports on it thoroughly in its Annual Report. In its Annual Report, Four Rivers reports on each Accountability Plan goal, and provides a brief commentary that explains whether the objective

was met and summarizes the strategies the school planned to enact to meet the goal in the future. As the school is in its second year of operation, several goals do not yet have data available for related measurements. However, for measurements with data available, Four Rivers has shown progress towards meeting many of its goals.

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

Finding: Four Rivers has made progress toward implementing the key elements promised in its charter. Four Rivers is guided by its mission and four basic commitments that it has made to its students, families and the community. The four commitments, Expect the best, Learn by doing, Explore big questions, and Build character and community, are influenced by the school's affiliation with Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound. The school has made concerted efforts to develop a program that focuses on each of these commitments, and while the elements of this program are in differing stages of development, it was clear to the site visit team that the school is on its way to becoming the school it promised in its charter.

Accountability plan goals for faithfulness to charter are reported upon below.

Accountability Plan Goal 10: Themes: Nature, Technology, Community:

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

Indicators	Progress toward meeting the goal	Has the goal been met?
Once per year, all students will complete individual or small group projects that address the essential question in the school's mission: <i>How do we find the healthy, fruitful interrelationship of the natural world, technology in its many forms, and the human community?</i> 90% of these projects will be of <i>Meeting</i> quality, as judged by the evaluations of experts and visitors to the school.		Cannot determine, as the site visit team did not examine evaluations of student work projects.

Accountability Plan Goal 11: Character and Community:

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

Indicators	Progress toward meeting the goal	Has the goal been met?
Students will engage in effective goal-setting for personal and academic growth, as documented in advisory records and student-led conferences.		Cannot determine, as the site visit team did not examine advisory records or talk extensively with teachers and students about student-led conferences.
The school will maintain a positive school culture, as reflected in an annual survey of parents and students, student and faculty retention, and observations by visiting educators.		Goal met. The 2004 Parent Survey indicates that the school has maintained a positive school culture.

Students will participate in service activities within the school and in the Franklin County community, as documented by advisory records and portfolios.		Cannot determine, as the site visit team did not examine advisory records or portfolios.
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Accountability Plan Goal 12: Expeditionary Learning:

Four Rivers Charter School will implement and disseminate Expeditionary Learning Core Practices.

Indicators	Progress toward meeting the goal	Has the goal been met?
The school will continue to improve its implementation of Expeditionary Learning Core Practices, as evidenced in the annual implementation review scoring by Expeditionary Learning consultants.		The team did not examine the annual implementation review of EL consultants.
The school will disseminate practices and products expressive of high quality Expeditionary Learning Core Practices to other schools and communities annually.		Goal met. Four Rivers has published in EL's newsletter, Fieldwork; participated in the EL annual national conference; and visited other EL network schools to learn from and share with other school communities.

Conclusion

The teachers, administrators, and Trustees of Four Rivers Charter Public School have made strong progress developing and refining the academic program and organizational systems necessary to realize the school's mission and achieve the student outcome targets set in the school's Accountability Plan. Based on the evidence gathered during the single day of the site visit team's inquiry, Four Rivers has demonstrated a strong commitment to the ongoing refinement and improvement of its academic program, and has identified key upcoming challenges and projects that will help guide and strengthen this work. The school has brought together a strong staff who is committed to implementing Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound, and helping the school become an active member in that national community of schools and educators. Four Rivers should continue to gather and report evidence that reflects progress towards meeting its Accountability Plan goals in the three areas of charter school accountability: academic success, organizational viability, and faithfulness to the terms of its charter. Although Four Rivers still has progress to make in the areas of curriculum development and development of a full high school program, the school is well positioned and stable as it moves into its third year of operation.