for his/her school's success. Using standardized interview protocols ensured that detailed information was collected from each school leader about each of the four research areas: budgets, staffing, curriculum and instruction, and school culture. In addition, standardizing the questions across schools helped to ensure that it would be possible to compare school leader perspectives across the three schools about each research area. For example, all the school leaders were asked to answer the question "What motivates students to achieve at this school?" which yielded important insights into how each school leader thinks about the culture of his or her school and also made possible the opportunity to compare and contrast cultures across the schools. Similarly, asking each school leader "How, if at all, does the school coordinate curriculum instruction within and across grade levels and disciplines?" provided important insights into each school's instructional systems and made possible cross-school comparisons of the roles played by the school leaders and teachers in curriculum development. These interviews took advantage of school leaders' uniquely global view of each school's operation and were supplemented, complemented, or challenged by data from focus groups with other school-level actors. In addition, Morgan (1997) posits that individual interviews can be helpful in both refining the focus group discussion guides and facilitating the focus groups, because data from the interviews can help the researcher to better understand "how people [within a given organization or community] think and talk about the topics that the groups will discuss" (p. 22).

Focus Groups (Trustees, Teachers, Parents, Students)

Focus groups are a special type of group discussion organized for the purpose of collecting data, composed of a small number of group members with common features connected to the topic to be discussed, and moderated by a facilitator committed to creating an environment in which participants feel comfortable sharing their experiences and perspectives (Morgan, 1997; Krueger & Casey, 2000). In this study, the focus groups consisted of separate group discussions among three to seven trustees, three to seven teachers, three to seven parents, and three to seven students (in the case of RPC) moderated by either the author (at APR and NHCS) or another independent researcher (at RPC).

There are a number of potential advantages to using focus groups rather than conducting a series of individual interviews with members of each group. Morgan (1997) argues that a key advantage of conducting focus groups is that issues and patterns often emerge as a result of the interaction between focus group participants that would not emerge in a series of individual interviews. For example, had the question "What qualities make your school different from other district and charter schools in Boston?" been asked of teachers in individual interviews, each teacher might have given fairly similar answers, but in the focus group setting teachers were able to build on each other's answers and therefore provided more detail and nuance than would have been attained from individual interviews. Morgan adds that the "process of sharing and comparing provides the rare opportunity to collect direct evidence on how the participants themselves understand their similarities and differences" (p. 21). For example, the

question "Why did you choose this school for your child?" in the parent focus groups generally did not yield entirely uniform answers even within the focus groups at each school, but rather a mix of answers that complemented other evidence about what families see as the strengths of each school. Patton (1990) notes that a potential benefit of the use of focus groups is a reduction in the likelihood of extreme answers or false responses because participants serve as checks on each other's contributions (p. 336). Using focus groups in this dissertation will provide substantial evidence of patterns in how members of each group of school-level actors understand the relationship between various aspects of school operation and student achievement.

The focus groups were conducted with segmented samples – that is with participants from only one group of school-level actors – to both enhance the quality of the discussions and provide additional data on differences and similarities in trends within the groups. In discussions with peers as opposed to mixed-group discussions, participants are both more likely to be open and more likely to directly engage the other participants (Morgan, 1997). Krueger and Casey (2000) warn that in groups where there is a power differential (either real or perceived), such as teachers and parents in this study, participants may be less willing to share their thoughts and feelings. An additional benefit of a segmented approach is that similarities and differences between perspectives shared within each of the groups will provide useful additional data (Krueger & Casey, 2000; Morgan, 1997). This is important because people in different roles within communities often have quite distinct views about various aspects of the community's functioning. For example, teachers may see the primary benefit of after-school tutoring as additional academic time on task, while the parent and student focus groups might

reveal that a potentially more important benefit of teachers' offering after-school tutoring

may be communication of the message that teachers care about the students and believe

in their academic potential. To facilitate the emergence of insights from cross-group

comparisons within and across schools, standard focus group discussion guides were used

to ensure that similar topics were raised in all groups (Morgan, 1997).

Table 3.2 summarizes the sources of qualitative and quantitative data to be used in

this dissertation.

Table 3.2

Sources of Qualitative and Quantitative Data

	Budgets	Staffing	Curriculum and Instruction	School Culture
Qualitative	• School leader interviews • Trustee focus groups • Daily schedule	• School leader interviews • Trustee, teacher, parent, and student focus groups	• Daily schedule • School leader interviews • Trustee, teacher, parent, and student focus groups	• Daily schedule • School leader interviews • Trustee, teacher, parent, and student focus groups
Quantitative	• '02 -'03 and '03 -'04 Annual Budgets • School size • Class size • Staff-to-student ratios • Length of school day, length of school year	• Demographic statistics for staff • Staff education and experience • Staff turnover	• MCAS scores • Stanford 9 scores	• Attendance • Disciplinary consequences • High School placement results

By interviewing each school's leaders, conducting a focus group with each school's Board of Trustees, and reviewing the annual report and annual budget for each school, it will be possible to gain a deep understanding of each school's "espoused theory" – "the official version of how the program or organization operates" (Patton, 1990, p. 107). Through focus group discussions with teachers, parents, and students at each school and through a review of the Massachusetts Department of Education site visit reports for each school, it will be possible to generate a thorough description of each school's "theory-in-use" – what actually happens day-to-day inside of the school (Patton, 1990, p. 107). Ultimately, the goal of the data collection and analysis will be to produce a realistic description of each school's "theory of action" – how inputs and activities are related to outcomes and impacts (Patton, 1990, p. 107-108).

Controls

As described above, this dissertation constitutes what Miles and Huberman (1994) label a "naturalistic study," designed to explore in context how RPC, APR, and NHCS are using four key elements of charter school autonomy – budgets, staffing, curriculum and instruction, and school culture – in their effort to bridge the achievement gap between African-American students and white students. Given this goal, it is difficult to apply the concept of controls as typically defined in experimental studies.

However, as mentioned previously, in identifying patterns of behavior of these three schools, it was at times helpful to compare them with the Boston Public Schools. For example, published documents on Boston district schools - to a very limited degree –

allowed comparison of quantitative and qualitative data on Boston district schools'

budgets, staffing, curriculum and instruction, and school culture with those of the three

charter schools. Where relevant, quantitative data is used to compare the three

successful charter schools to the district in terms of school size, student-to-teacher ratios,

hours per school day, school days per year, staff demographics, etc. This data is used

exclusively for descriptive purposes, to help to contextualize the uniqueness of the three

case study charter schools.

As Purkey and Smith (1983) or Rowan, Bossert, and Dwyer (1983) might

suggest, research for this dissertation generated evidence about the qualitative differences

in the core areas of school operation that may create organizational cultures that make a

difference in student achievement. Qualitative data such as the Boston public schools

curriculum standards or school profiles describing school activities and services were

also occasionally helpful for making comparisons. More significantly, when asked to

identify unique characteristics of the three charter schools, the study participants (school

leaders, trustees, parents, teachers, and students) often used Boston district schools for

both explicit and implicit comparisons.

Data Analysis

The three layers of analysis in this dissertation, as shown in Table 3.3 below,

involve: (1) describing how these three effective school cultures function; (2) identifying

patterns or themes within their experiences; and (3) using the research literature to

generate hypotheses. Analysis of the data began with constructing detailed case studies

describing the experiences of each of the three successful charter schools. These thematic narrative case studies describe the budget, staffing, curriculum, and school culture of each of the three schools. From these case studies emerge themes and patterns addressing the fundamental research question: How are three successful urban public charter middle schools using four key elements of charter school autonomy (budgets, staffing, curriculum and instruction, and school culture) to bridge the achievement gap between African-American students and white students?

The literature on educational practices effective in bridging the achievement gap and the literature of charter schools provided "sensitizing concepts" (Patton, 1990, p. 391) – or key ideas and characteristics – to be used in analyzing the data. For example, Elmore (1999) and Sebring and Bryk (2000) advance a vision of the principal as an instructional leader who carefully monitors teachers' instructional practices and organizes professional development opportunities that advances the school's unique instructional program; therefore, it was important to assess how this feature of life within each school is described in the published documents, school leader interviews, and focus groups. Thus, it was possible to use concepts such as school leadership to conduct open coding. Strauss and Corbin (1990) define open coding as "the part of analysis that pertains specifically to the naming and categorizing of phenomena through close examination of data" (p. 62).

Table 3.3

Analytic Strategy

Level	Description
1	Narrative case studies
2	Open coding, using sensitizing concepts to look for patterns, themes
3	Assessing themes using the research literature: a) literature on educational practices effective in bridging the achievement gap; and b) literature of charter schools

For each key area of school operation (budget, staffing, curriculum and instruction, and school culture), literature on educational practices effective in bridging the achievement gap and the literature of charter schools will supply concepts to organize the information garnered from published documents, interviews, and focus group participants. In the area of budget, the initial codes that emerged from analyzing the data through the lens of the research literature were: "small schools" (e.g, Greenwald, Hedges, & Laine, 1996; Darling-Hammond, 1997), "small classes" (e.g., Mosteller, Light, & Sachs, 1996; Ferguson, 1998a; Finn & Achilles, 1999; Nye, Hedges, & Konstantopoulos, 1999); "reduced teacher loads" (e.g., Elmore, 2002; Miles, 1995; Shepard, 2000), "professional development" (e.g., Cohen and Hill, 2000; Miles, 2001; Odden, 2000); "extended learning time" (e.g., Davis and Thomas, 1989; Heath and McLaughlin, 1994); "facilities costs" (e.g., UCLA, 1998); "sub-par teacher salaries" (e.g., Miron & Nelson, 2000; AFT, 2002); and "fundraising" (e.g., Kane & Lauricella, 2001). An example of an additional code that emerged from further analysis of the Neighborhood House data was the "full-

service model." In the area of staffing, the initial codes to emerge from the data were: "high expectations" (e.g., Ferguson,1998b; Ogbu & Simons, 1998); "pedagogical understanding" (e.g., Elmore, 1995; Darling-Hammond, 1997); "content expertise" (e.g., Elmore, 1995; Darling-Hammond and Falk , 1997; Monk, 1994); "dynamic roles" (e.g., Darling-Hammond, 1997); "teacher collaboration" (e.g., Birman et al., 2000; Cohen & Hill, 2000; Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin, 1995; King & Newmann, 2000; Talbert & McLaughlin, 1994;); "merit pay" (e.g., Miles, 2001); "counseling out" (e.g., Sebring and Bryk, 2000; Wilson, 1992; Nathan, 1999; Finn et al., 2000); "principal instructional leadership" (e.g., Elmore, 1999); and "coherence making" (e.g., Sebring and Bryk, 2000; Bryk & Schneider, 2002). An example of an additional code that emerged from further analysis of the data in each of the three case studies was "long hours" because the intense work schedule of the staff at each school came up in virtually every interview and focus group conversation. For curriculum and instruction, the initial codes to emerge from the data were: "instructional coherence" (e.g., Newmann et al., 2001; Kane, 2001); "rigor and high standards" (e.g., Elmore, 1995); "data driven instruction" (e.g., Shepard, 2000); "individualized attention" (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Finn & Achilles, 1999); and "culturally responsive instruction" (e.g., Ogbu and Simons, 1998; Steele, 1992; Steele & Aronson, 1998). "Alignment with the MA standards and the MCAS" is an example of a code that emerged from further analysis of the case study data in this area. Finally, with respect to school culture the initial codes that emerged from the data were: "trust" (Ogbu & Simons, 1998; Bryk & Schneider, 2002); "relationships" (e.g., Darling-Hammond, 1997; Darling-Hammond and Falk, 1997; Greenwald, Hedges, & Laine, 1996; Steele, 1992); "culturally responsive instruction" (Ogbu & Simons, 1998; Steele, 1992; Steele &

Aronson, 1998); "role models" (Ogbu & Simons, 1998; Steele, 1992; Steele & Aronson, 1998; Perry, 2003); "high standards" (e.g., Ogbu & Simons, 1998; Steele, 1992; Perry, 2003); "parent involvement" (e.g., Ogbu & Simons, 1998; SRI, 1997); "celebration of achievement" (Perry, 2003); and "safe and structured" (e.g., Hill, Foster, and Gendler, 1990). Further analysis of the NHCS case study led to the addition of the code "community partnerships." Use of codes generated from analyzing the case study data through the lens of the research literature facilitated the organization of each of the case studies and ultimately laid the groundwork for the analysis chapter.

Validity

Maxwell (1996) argues that a critical goal in ensuring the validity of a study is triangulation – "collecting information from a diverse range of individuals and settings, using a variety of methods" in order to get the most complete picture possible of the object of study (p. 93). Toward this end, this dissertation relies on diverse data sources (annual reports, annual budgets, Massachusetts Department of Education site visit reports, school leaders, parents, students, and teachers) to ensure that the results reflect multiple perspectives and not just the views of one segment of each school community. Similarly, multiple means of data collection (review of published documents, in-depth interviews, and focus groups) help to protect against such methodological problems as biased interview questions, biased interview or focus group responses, and extrapolation based on insufficient data.

To mitigate possible investigator bias, a different researcher was used to conduct the focus groups at RPC because the author's role as founding Co-Director of RPC could threaten his ability to collect reliable data. Focus group participants might have been tempted to slant their answers in an effort to align their views with what they perceive as the views of the school leader. In order to reduce this potential, an independent researcher (a Harvard Graduate School of Education doctoral student with significant research experience and expertise) was contracted to conduct the interviews of RPC school leaders and the focus groups of trustees, parents, teachers, and students. Of course, some risk of slanted responses remained because participants knew the research project was associated with the school leader of Roxbury Prep.

Limitations

The chief limitation of this study is its particularity – it tells the stories of three particular schools that are succeeding in bridging the achievement gap and cannot purport to serve as a blueprint for other charter schools. As Cuban (1983) writes, "None of the highly detailed, lovingly written descriptions of effective schools can point to a blueprint of what a teacher, principal, or superintendent should do in order to improve academic achievement" (p. 695). It is, as Cuban suggests, impossible to offer a recipe for effective schooling. However, it is possible to develop recommendations based on a thorough understanding of the processes within each of these schools that contribute to the school climate that produces unusual student achievement.

Ethical Issues

The most significant ethical issue at stake in this study is the possibility of researcher bias. Given the role of the author of this dissertation as founding co-director of Roxbury Preparatory Charter School, it is worth noting that Sarason (1998) is not hopeful about the capacity of charter school founders to effectively document the stories of their schools. He argues that charter school leaders are too busy creating their schools to have time for "dispassionate observation and description" (p. 56). Sarason adds that, "Precisely because they are passionate people, they should not be expected to be even semi-objective reporters" (p. 56). Thus the methodology of this dissertation aims to reduce the risk of researcher bias resulting from the author's deep engagement with Roxbury Prep (i.e., by using an outside interviewer for interviews and focus groups conducted at Roxbury Prep), while still taking advantage of the author's intimate understanding of charter school dynamics. In addition, since the "success" of the three schools is a critical assumption of this dissertation, the author's position on charter schools as a tool for urban education reform is less relevant than if this were an evaluative study. However, given the author's intimate involvement with the design of RPC, vigilant care must be taken to avoid mistakenly linking effects to factors that are merely correlated rather than causal. Indeed, this dissertation, built as it is on qualitative studies of just three schools, can only seek to offer hypotheses about how attributes of school culture might contribute to successfully bridging the achievement gap.

Permission and confidentiality are also critical ethical issues. Parental permission for interviewing students is, of course, required. In terms of confidentiality, the names of the three schools and all study participants will be changed to protect their identity should

this study later be referenced in an article or book. Participants were informed of this as part of an informed consent form they completed prior to their interviews or focus groups.

The Case Studies

The case studies constructed as described above present fine-grained descriptions of how the actors within each of the case study schools understand their schools to be using their autonomy with respect to budgets, staffing, curriculum and instruction, and school culture to bridge the achievement gap. The case studies are organized as descriptive narratives, taking each key area of autonomy in turn and presenting themes in the data collected from the review of published documents, the in-depth interviews of school leaders, and the focus groups (teachers, parents, trustees, and students [in the case of RPC]). The sub-headings within each section of the case studies reflect features identified in the research literature – literature on educational practices effective in bridging the achievement gap and literature of charter schools – as important to school success or recurrent themes identified through the research conducted at each school. The analysis chapter that follows the case studies uses the research literature to look across the three schools to capture trends across the cases.

IV -- CASE STUDIES

Roxbury Preparatory Charter School

Introduction

Roxbury Preparatory Charter School opened its doors in September 1999 with an

entering class of 80 sixth grade students. The founding team was comprised of four

people: (1) an African-American higher education administrator with deep roots in the

Roxbury community; (2) the long-serving African-American principal of a highly-

regarded district middle school in Roxbury; (3) an African-American and Puerto Rican

teacher at a Boston charter high school, and (4) the author of the charter, a White

graduate of the Harvard Graduate School of Education principal training program who

had been a teacher and administrator at a Louisville, Kentucky private school, where he

directed a summer and after school academic enrichment program for disadvantaged

students. In the charter application, the multi-racial founding group spoke explicitly

about the population it envisioned serving and the unique challenges that its student

population would face:

> Many students in Roxbury face racial and economic challenges and lack
> opportunities that more privileged youth take for granted. While most
> middle and upper-class children expect to attend college, many Roxbury
> students are told implicitly and explicitly that higher education is not an
> option... In order to level the educational and economic playing fields,
> Roxbury Preparatory Charter School exists to prepare its students to enter
> and succeed in college. (RPC Application for a Public School Charter, p.
> 1)

The school's mission statement translates the charter application's explicit commitment

to bridging the achievement gap into a specific vision of what schools must do to prepare

its low income students of color (currently, the student population is 100% African-

American and Latino, 68% free and reduced price lunch eligible) to succeed in college:

> Roxbury Preparatory Charter School, a public school that serves grades
> 6-8, prepares its students to enter, succeed in, and graduate from college.
> Roxbury Prep is founded on the philosophy that all students are entitled to
> and can succeed in college preparatory programs when: 1) the curriculum
> is rigorous, engaging, and well-planned; 2) the school emphasizes student
> character, community responsibility, and exposure to life's possibilities;
> and 3) a community network supports student academic, social, and
> physical well-being. Roxbury Prep helps students gain admission to
> outstanding public and private college preparatory high schools. (RPC
> 2003-2004 Annual Report, p. i)

According to each of the school's key constituencies – teachers, administrators, trustees,

parents, and students – schoolwide decision-making is consistently driven by a

commitment to raising student achievement. The RPCS Charter Renewal Inspection

Report explains:

> The RPCS mission is the driving force behind all aspects of the school…
> The RPCS mission is used to guide decisions at the whole-school level as
> well as at the classroom level. Staffing allocations, roles and
> responsibilities, and personnel and program evaluation are clearly linked
> to achieving the school's ambitious mission (p. 17).

This commitment to mission in decisions about budget, staffing, curriculum and

instruction, and school culture is described in detail below.

Budget

Small School, Small Classes. The most significant financial decision for a charter

school is how many students to enroll, both because state-funded per pupil tuition is

invariably the largest source of revenue for a charter school and because the number of

students drives a school's financial decisions about staffing, facilities, and virtually all

variable educational expenses.[2] The decision to make Roxbury Prep's enrollment less than half the size of the average Boston Public Middle School reflects the school's culture of accountability.[3] Co-founder and charter author Evan Rudall connects the school's small size to the ability of the school leaders to hold school staff accountable, "I think it makes a big difference to have a small school… [w]here the school leader or leaders have the time to deal with and give input on virtually any issue, I think that provides consistency and strengthens the culture. The school is of [a] size that the director of curriculum and instruction can get to every teacher every day." A teacher emphasizes that the small size of the school ensures student accountability, "I can walk out of my office and I know every child that is not in class and I can ask them why they're not in class and why they're not walking faster to class? Kids feel that adult presence and so many adults per child and there's one hallway. There's nowhere for them to get lost." Co-Director Phillips describes the relationship between the school's size and a sense of community in which no one is anonymous – a climate that could be characterized as an atmosphere of mutual accountability. A parent trustee notes,

> I also believe that, compared to the district schools, our numbers are much lower than our district schools, and I think attributes to a huge success within the school. And I always think [of] Roxbury Prep as a safe environment--don't mean physically, but academically safe environment, where it's sort of a transparency school. You can walk in there and you know exactly what's going on at all times, whether in the classroom or administratively.

Greenwald, Hedges, and Laine (1996) and Darling-Hammond (1997) emphasize that small schools foster stronger relationship between students and school staff which is borne out by the accounts of the key constituencies at Roxbury Prep. However, it is

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[2] At Roxbury Prep, per-pupil tuition accounted for 72% of revenue for 2003-2004.
[3] As of 2005-06, the average enrollment in a Boston Public School was 508 students. (See http://www.boston.k12.ma.us/schools/schlevel.asp.)

interesting to note that school staff and parents see those relationships as levers for instilling in students the sense that they are responsible to the adults in the school community. Within the RPC community, the school's small size is thought of as a tool to ensure that nothing falls through the cracks – that every teacher is accountable for his or her instruction and that every student is accountable to the school staff for his or her conduct and academic effort.

Small class size is linked in the RPC charter application to teacher accountability for student performance: "RPCS students receive a tremendous amount of individual attention. Class size at RPC is limited... and grade-level teachers teach no more than 72 students each year, ensuring that teachers know the needs of their students" (RPC Application for a Public School Charter, p. 6). Average class size at RPC is roughly twenty-two students as opposed to twenty-nine in Boston Public Schools middle schools.[4] All constituencies emphasize the relationship between class size and teachers' ability to address students' academic deficiencies. A parent comments about class size at RPC, "I like that the classrooms are very small, the setting. So your child gets the attention that he or she needs." A student notes, "Our classes are kind of small. My class is the smallest class in the whole school, so any time you need help, the teachers, you can always ask them for tutoring." A teacher points out the importance of small class size for the quality of her instruction and adds, "I used to have 150 kids in five classes at another public school I taught at, and [at Roxbury Prep] there's 180 kids in the whole school." Co-Founder Rudall emphasizes the priority placed on keeping teachers' student loads down when developing the school's budget and explains, "I think anyone who has taught would

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[4] As of the 2002-03 school year, average middle school class size within Boston Public Schools was 29. (See http://www.boston.k12.ma.us/bps/budget03/classsize.asp.)

tell you that it's more productive to have fewer students. It's just not debatable. You know all those studies on class size will tell you conflicting things. Any teacher who's ever been in the classroom will tell you that it's more productive to have 20 kids in the room than 40 kids." Co-Director Phillips also describes the significance of class size in determining the school's budget and says of the budget, "So it's not done from a finance perspective first. It's really done from a student achievement perspective first and then the finances come after..." Within the RPC community there is a conviction that small class size will yield better student outcomes because of teacher and student accountability for learning and so the school invests its resources accordingly. This conviction is consistent with the finding by Finn and Achilles (1999) that small classes would make it possible for teachers to invest greater time in providing students with individualized feedback, assessing the skills and progress of individual students, and holding students responsible for their academic and behavioral performance.

Extended Learning Time. The choice of an extended school day is another budget decision that reflects a commitment to academic achievement. It is described in the RPC charter application in the context of time on task: "The school day is extended until 4:00 PM at RPCS. Students, in school more than 20% longer than required by law, spend increased time mastering academics" (RPC Application for a Public School Charter, p. 6). However, the school's schedule has evolved to ensure that extended time is targeted to meeting students' academic needs. The application for charter renewal explains, "During the 1999-2000 academic year, 6th grade students participated in only one math course. Given our goals for student performance in math and the need to address students' skills in both math procedures and math problem solving, we inaugurated two

daily periods of math..." (RPC Application for a Public School Charter, p. 17). This conviction within the Roxbury Prep community that more time on task will yield better results – precisely the claim made by Davis and Thomas (1989) – is reflected in both math and English instruction at Roxbury Prep: The Massachusetts 2020 report describes and validates quantitative evidence that supports the school's double-period approach:

> Currently, Roxbury Prep students take two periods of math daily. However, students in Roxbury Prep's first graduating class (Class of 2002) did not have double math classes until their eighth grade year. In a comparison of test scores of this first class to the test scores of the class of 2003, which had had double math periods for all three years, 37 percent more students in the class of 2003 scored at the proficient level on the eighth grade math MCAS. This progress continued with the class of 2004, which had also participated in double math classes for all three years, and which had 52 percent more students scoring proficient than had the class of 2002. In addition, almost all students in the classes of 2003 and 2004 passed the eighth grade math MCAS, while only 70 percent of the students in the class of 2002 had passed the test. The dramatic improvement in test scores solidly affirmed Roxbury Prep's decision to require double math classes for all students and suggests that the pedagogical premise upon which this decision was based—more time equals more learning—is legitimate. (Massachusetts 2020, 2005, p. 15-16)

A student explains Roxbury Prep students' superior performance on the MCAS by saying, "The only reason why I think this is because we're more prepared. We have two English classes, we have a Reading and an English class, and two Math classes." The establishment of the Drop Everything And Read period, during which all students and staff at the school read silently for the first of twenty-five minutes of the day, was also connected to the school's faith in time on task as the key to achievement: "[S]tudent progress in Reading, as measured by the Stanford 9 and internal comps, continued to lag behind English Language and Math. Therefore, in 2001-2002, to increase reading progress and support students' development as lifelong readers, we began a Drop Everything and Read program..." (RPCS Charter Renewal Application, p. 17)   Parallel

explanations – emphasizing the need for more time to make up for deficiencies – are offered for the creation of Homework Center and the initiation of double-period science labs in the 8th grade.

The RPC charter application explicitly links the decision to provide tutoring to student accountability for meeting the school's academic standards: "Extensive school-year and summer support is provided… to ensure that students meet the school's standards and to address skill deficiencies students have upon entrance to RPCS" (RPC Application for a Public School Charter, p. 2). Roxbury Prep allocates nearly $30,000 for staff salaries for summer school. After school tutoring time is also described as a tool for student accountability: "Students who are unable to complete homework satisfactorily or who are struggling in class are required to stay after school to study and to ensure achievement" (RPC Application for a Public School Charter, p. 6). The MA Charter Renewal Inspection Report notes, "Moving students in and out of tutorial groups is one way in which assessment and instructional [strategies] are closely linked and fluid." Roxbury Prep invests in tutoring in three ways: funding an AfterPrep Coordinator to oversee teachers and volunteers who provide tutoring and supervise homework completion after school each day, compensating teachers for mandatory Math Saturday School, and hiring sufficient teachers to maintain a reasonable class load (4 academic classes or 1 academic class and an enrichment class) while requiring each teacher to tutor a minimum of four academic periods per week and once per week after school. The Massachusetts 2020 report notes, "At Roxbury Prep, teachers indicated that this tutoring is especially important because in the fast-paced atmosphere of the classrooms, teachers are not always able to address the needs of each individual student in class. Regular and

designated times for tutoring, however, enable teachers to more effectively pinpoint material that is unclear to students and to help them work through it." (p. 16) A student expresses appreciation for all of the tutoring available at Roxbury Prep by saying, "And I guarantee that there wasn't any time that they [teachers] said no when a student needed tutoring. So no matter what, they'll always be there to help tutor you. That's what I like about teachers." In focus groups conducted for the Massachusetts 2020 report, one seventh grader said of the extended day, "I thought it would be the worst thing ever but I got used to it. You just don't look at your watch. Having enrichment classes where you choose what you want to do helps a lot. It's not all work." (Time for A Change, p. 28) Asked whether Roxbury Prep students have too much school, an eighth grader said simply "No, I wouldn't be doing anything at home anyway. It keeps you out of trouble" (Time for A Change, p. 28). Roxbury Prep's extensive investment in tutoring – specifically tutoring by students' own carefully selected and trained teachers – is consistent with the finding by Shanahan (1998) that tutoring done by well-qualified tutors can make a significant positive contribution to student achievement.

Extensive Professional Development. The school's vision of teaching as a professional craft that teachers must work to hone is reflected in the school's direction of resources toward professional development. Investing in professional development begins with the school's decision to fund three weeks of staff orientation and teacher curriculum development each summer. Compensating teachers for working through much of August costs the school over $35,000 per year, but the school's leaders and teachers believe it is a critical investment. A teacher says of the school's staff, "There's a common culture developed around departments for meeting that happen in the summer

through collegial work around standards." Another points to the advantage Roxbury Prep teachers have – because they enter the school-year having mapped out standards, activities, and assessments for the year – over teachers in other schools, about whom she says: "you're putting together your unit plan, it's Sunday night, no particular idea what you're going to teach for the next month, month and a half maybe, and what am I going to do tomorrow? We just don't do that here." This investment in summer professional development is reminiscent of Odden's (2000) claim about the importance of a multi-week summer training institute to the successful implementation of whole-school reform models. In addition to compensation for summer work, each Roxbury Prep teacher is provided with a $500 professional development grant to pursue professional development opportunities beyond those provided by the various collaborative learning initiatives the school provides. Teachers have used these funds to attend traditional professional development conferences, to take relevant courses at local universities, and to pursue National Board Certification. In its application for renewal of its charter, RPC promised that, "To promote teacher retention and support continuous improvement in instruction, Roxbury Prep will establish a fund for teacher development to finance professional development opportunities, graduate school tuition, etc." (RPC Application for a Public School Charter, p. 22). The resulting Investment in Instruction initiative provides graduate tuition funding for teachers in exchange for a commitment of two years teaching at the school for each year of coursework funded (MA Charter Renewal Inspection Report for RPC, p. 20). However, the applications for both the $500 professional development grants and the graduate funding require teachers to persuade the school's co-directors that the proposed professional development will significantly enhance their

contribution to the school meeting its school-wide goals for students' academic and social development. At Roxbury Prep, the paid summer curriculum development work, $500 professional development grants, and graduate tuition are all consistent with the argument put forward by Sebring and Bryk (2000) and Newmann et al. (2001) that investments in professional development best advance student achievement when closely aligned with coherent school-wide instructional approaches and goals.

High School Placement & Graduate Services. As a college preparatory middle school, Roxbury Prep's capacity to fulfill its mission is contingent on students' success in high school. Obviously, a critical factor in students' success in high school is the quality of the high schools to which they matriculate. The 2003-2004 Roxbury Prep annual report explains:

> Admission to the most successful college preparatory programs is based on competitive and often complex application processes. Barriers can exist in the form of application fees, geographic distance, lack of awareness, standardized test preparation, and language. Moreover, as students transition into these programs, they require advocacy, additional advising, academic/career services, and access to strong peer networks. Roxbury Prep's High School Placement Program addresses these issues. (p. 13)

Roxbury Prep's investment in its High School Placement Program includes a full-time Director of High School Placement and a part-time Graduate Services Coordinator. In its charter renewal application, submitted within a year of its first eighth grade graduation, RPC promised to:

> ...seek funding for alumni services, including advocacy on behalf of alumni and their families to help negotiate the academic and administrative culture of high school; alumni workshops on high school course selection, social issues, summer/school-year internships, and the college admissions process; and alumni activities ensure that students retain their connection to the college-bound culture of Roxbury Prep such as reunions and mentoring opportunities. (RPC Application for a Public School Charter, p. 24)

High school placement services and graduate services are not typical features of public middle school budgets, but constitute a high priority line item for Roxbury Prep. In fact, when asked, "If your school were given a $100,000 grant to spend however you would like, how would you spend it?" Co-Director Phillips responded, "I think first and foremost, we would do some more with high school placement and graduate services." This investment is particularly noteworthy because it is not anticipated by the literature on educational practices effective in raising the achievement of low-income students of color. On the surface, the investment in high school placement and graduate services seems to be an investment in the school's college prep mission more than an investment specifically in boosting student achievement. However, at a deeper level, this investment may indeed directly impact achievement for reasons discussed above in the section on school culture. A vision of themselves in college prep high schools – particularly elite college prep high schools – and exposure to Roxbury Prep alumni succeeding in college prep high schools and college may serve an important motivational purpose: encouraging students to try harder academically and deepening their faith that success in school can translate into success in life (a belief Ogbu & Simons (1998) might suggest many of Roxbury Prep's low-income students of color might lack in the absence of intervention).

Staffing

Rigorous Selection. The RPCS Charter Renewal Application declares, "Roxbury Prep's success is primarily due to the school's phenomenal teaching staff" (p. 12). Co-Director Phillips says of Roxbury Prep's approach to teacher recruitment: "We spend the most time on hiring . . . more time on hiring than I think many schools do, so we really

look for incredibly outstanding people." The RPCS 2003-2004 Annual Report explains that the school uses advertisements in newspapers, participation in recruitment fairs, extensive e-mailing, private school placement services, and a network of organizational contacts (including Teach for America, Summerbridge, and the Rockefeller Brothers Fund Fellowship for Minorities Entering the Teaching Profession) to develop a pool of over 1,000 resumes per year. Roxbury Prep seeks teachers who: (1) "are dedicated to and effective with urban middle school students of color;" (2) "have subject matter expertise and use a variety of teaching methods to engage students;" (3) "are committed to improving curriculum and instruction through collaboration and data analysis;" and (4) "communicate effectively with students, parents, colleagues, and community members" (RPCS 2003-2004 Annual Report, p. 17)

To find teachers that exhibit the desired qualities, Roxbury Prep uses a five-stage selection process. First, resumes are screened for the desired qualifications. For example, Co-Director Phillips emphasizes the importance of selecting candidates with high-quality academic training in their content areas and explained "…our teachers are sort of masters of their field and they love the specific subject matter that they're teaching. So our Math teachers are mathematicians, our Science teachers are scientists, our History teachers are historians, and that isn't always the case in schools." A teacher notes that the detailed curriculum development work teachers do in the summer – particularly identifying what students must know and be able to do by the end of each middle school year in order to progress toward success in college – requires content expertise:

> You can't do that unless people are all experts in their field. And so all
> the teachers have a degree in what they're teaching, for the most part, and

> they're all very smart people... Everyone knows a lot about what they're
> teaching and knows it well beyond a middle school level of understanding.
> So if you are an expert in Math, you can figure out what kids need to
> know to get to this next point. You don't have to rely on the textbook to
> figure that out... And so, I think at a lot of schools where sometimes you
> talk about what you teach, it's based on the book that the school has
> adopted because people can't always rely on their own knowledge. And I
> think here people rely [on] and trust their own expertise.

The RPCS Charter Renewal Inspection Report noted evidence of teacher content

knowledge: "[C]lassroom observations revealed a consistent comfort level and fluidity

delivering instruction, suggesting a firm grasp of subject material" (p. 15). In the second

phase of the selection process, candidates participate in an initial interview with one of

the co-directors. Co-Director Phillips says of the candidates he wants, "They're mission

driven, they're passionate about the mission; they care deeply about our kids, they want

... [their students] to succeed; and.... they're experts in their field." The RPCS Charter

Renewal Inspection Report suggests the school is effective in screening candidates for

high expectations: "Teachers express clear expectations that all students can achieve at a

high level, supporting the school's belief, stated in the mission, that 'all students can

succeed in college preparatory programs'" (p. 13). Third, candidates are asked to teach a

sample lesson at the school in the content area and grade level in which they are applying

to teach. Co-Director Rudall notes, "We want people who come in and teach a lesson

that shows that they're able to connect well with students in the classroom and are well

planned, and can think on their feet." Fourth, candidates debrief the sample lesson with

current Roxbury Prep teachers. The RPCS Charter Renewal Inspection Report describes

teachers' participation in the hiring process as reflective of a culture of staff

empowerment (p. 18). Co-Founder Rudall emphasizes, "We only hire teachers whom

we think will be collegial. It's just essential to us that our teachers get along well with

each other and with us and with students." Fifth, candidates must interview with the other co-director and submit references, transcripts, and a writing sample. Co-Director Phillips adds that there may even be a sixth stage to the Roxbury Prep hiring process: "And then there are many cases where we ask people to teach an additional sample lesson, just to make sure they're the right person." In reflecting on the relationship between the arduous hiring process and the school's results, Co-Director Phillips explains, "The hiring process is probably the most important thing that we do... I think studies clearly show that student achievement is largely based on the teacher who is teaching them in the classroom for the full 50 minutes. So if that person is not qualified, or if that person is not good, then your results aren't going to be there and kids aren't going to learn and then it's not going to happen." The extraordinary investment of time and energy in staff recruitment by Roxbury Prep's school leaders is consistent with Sebring and Bryk's (2000) finding that principals who achieve superior results for low-income students focus on strengthening the instructional program at their schools by hiring high-quality teachers.

Careful Evaluation. Roxbury Prep has chosen to deviate from district school employment practices by issuing all staff members one-year at-will letters of agreement (without the possibility of tenure) that explicitly link continued employment at the school to evaluation according to the Roxbury Prep Criteria for Outstanding Teaching. Charter advocates like Wilson (1992), Nathan (1999), and Finn et al. (2000) highlight the ability of charter school leaders to terminate ineffective teachers – free from the tenure constraints faced by district principals – as a key advantage of charter school autonomy. Co-Director Phillips emphasizes, "There is a Roxbury Prep way of teaching. That doesn't

mean you can't have your own style. . . certainly you want people to add things to the

curriculum and bring their own things that they've learned from other places. But there

are certain things that we expect teachers to do." He indicates that when staff members

fail to meet these expectations, the school responds aggressively. The process for teacher

evaluation is clearly articulated in the school's staff handbook and is comprised of:

weekly informal observations by the co-director for curriculum and instruction and an

annual performance review meeting with the co-directors to discuss both a qualitative and

a quantitative evaluation (ranking teachers' performance against each criterion on a 1-5

scale) for each staff member. Contrasting the approach to teacher evaluation at Roxbury

Prep to the approach of other schools, a teacher indicates:

> I've never heard of anyone actually having a review process like the one
> we have here where there's a formal rubric where you're rated on objective
> standards and given feedback and told what you do well and told what you
> can do better, in very clear, objective terms. As opposed to, "Well, you got
> seniority yesterday."

When asked to describe why the school has terminated a teacher's employment mid-year

or declined to renew a teacher's contract, Co-Director Phillips explains,

> We expect teachers not to make excuses for our students that they had a
> difficult night at home, or that they are at a 3rd grade reading level so they
> are never going to be able to learn. That type of thing. That's just not going
> to happen here. So when those things start to happen, we confront it
> directly. We have direct conversations about it and we ask people to
> change. And we say to them, "This has to change. If it doesn't change,
> then we're going to have to mandate a change ourselves and we're going to
> have to look elsewhere for somebody to replace you."

Similarly, co-founder Rudall explains, "Teachers who were terminated mid year or who

were not asked to return were, in our eyes, ineffective in the classroom. They simply

weren't doing what we thought was necessary to ensure that students achieve at the

highest levels."

Roxbury Prep's willingness to fire underperforming teachers is consistent with research such as that of Sebring and Bryk (2000) who found that counseling out ineffective strategies was an important strategy for school improvement utilized by principals in higher achieving urban schools. The Massachusetts 2020 report links the strength of the Roxbury Prep staff culture to the school's rigorous standards for teaching: "Teachers at Roxbury Prep receive tremendous guidance and support from the instruction-oriented co-director as well as from other teachers at the school. The overall effect of this institutional focus on teaching and professional development is to create a culture of healthy critique and continuous improvement" (p. 32).

Co-Director Model. All constituencies report that the co-director model is critical to the school's culture of staff accountability. Co-Director Phillips explains:

> We have found, and I think it's fairly obvious, that if you go to a traditional school...there's usually a principal, maybe an assistant principal. But the principal is in charge of everything, in charge of student achievement, in charge of teaching, in charge of making sure the toilet is working, in charge of bus drivers, in charge of every facet of the school. What ends up happening is the task list is obviously too long, and so what gets put on the back burner is what's most important, which is student achievement and observing teachers and providing feedback.

In describing the role of the Co-Director for Curriculum & Instruction, the RPCS MA Charter Renewal Inspection Report explains:

> Teachers also reported weekly observations and feedback by the co-director for curriculum and instruction. Team members noticed the co-director doing informal observations in many classrooms during the inspection. Teachers reported that they receive an e-mail after these observations. The feedback might include a book suggestion that relates directly to the lesson content. Teachers indicated that these observations are helpful in modifying their lesson content or instructional strategies.

A teacher emphasizes that "[O]ne of the things that [the Co-Director for Curriculum & Instruction] does really, really well is that, to use [another teacher's] term, 'He's an intellectual geek just like the rest of us.' So it's OK to engage in two or three hour-long

discussions about curriculum on an August afternoon when everybody's hanging out at the beach." In addition to strengthening teaching, the RPCS Application for Charter Renewal argues that the instructional focus of the co-director for curriculum and instruction allows the co-director for operations and finance to focus on ensuring the smooth administrative functioning of the school. A teacher confirms this claim, saying of the school:

> It's very efficient in a way. I don't have to spend my time doing things that teachers have to do at other schools. Because we have two co-directors, from an administrative standpoint, we don't have to have someone who focuses on grants and facilities and money and student achievement, which most principals are asked to do, which I think is pretty much an impossible job.

Another teacher adds, "I think one of the reasons I really like working at Roxbury Prep is because I feel like if I see something, and I see a need and I propose a solution, there's really no bureaucracy to stop me from just doing it and making it happen." The focus of the co-director of curriculum & instruction on providing teachers with feedback and collaborating to improve instruction parallels the behavior of the principals in the high-performing urban schools Elmore (1999) describes. Similarly, the focus of the co-director of operations and finance on ensuring that teachers have the resources and organizational support they need to be maximally effective parallels what Sebring & Bryk (2000) found principals doing in Chicago in the schools with superior performance.

Higher Demands on Teachers. Roxbury Prep asks more of its teachers than most district schools. In addition to requiring teachers to start school three weeks earlier than Boston Public Schools, the Roxbury Prep school day for teachers is significantly longer. While Boston Public Schools teachers are required to be at school from 7:30 AM to 2:30 PM, Roxbury Prep teachers are required to be at school from 7:45 AM to 4:15 PM

Monday – Friday and to remain at school for at least one additional hour per week to

provide after school tutoring or lead an extracurricular activity (such as the school

newspaper or a book club). However, these contracted expectations do not reflect the

scope of the school's expectations for teachers. In answering the question, "Why do you

think students at this school do better on the MCAS than students in other Boston district

and charter schools?" one teacher says simply, "[b]ecause we teach them longer and

better." The RPCS Charter Renewal Inspection Report notes:

> The length of the school day illustrates the level of commitment and
> dedication by staff… Teachers were overhead offering to work with
> students on special projects well before the school opening at 7:45 AM.
> The team observed many staff members still at their desks or working with
> students nearly 12 hours later. Special activities often take place on
> Saturdays, and some field trips include overnight outings. (RPCS MA
> Charter Renewal Inspection Report, p. 18)

A teacher describes her message to teacher candidates about work life at Roxbury Prep as

"The first thing I said is [to] be prepared to work hard. If you're committed to what you're

going to do, then you won't think about the hours, and the hours will just happen. If you

buy into--just like a family--if you buy into the school and what's going on, the hours will

go by, your spouse will get upset, but you just have to prepare to work hard." Parents

and students appreciate and celebrate the dedication of teachers. A parent notes, "These

teachers are not just teachers 6 - 8 hours, these teachers are 24/7. That's the thing that

separates them from the rest: the fact that they're teachers 24/7, 365." Another parent

says of teachers, "it's not like school where you're leaving at 2:30 and that's the end of it.

They're here 'til way after 6:00, and they're readily available to however many students

needs them at that given time." A student says of teachers at Roxbury Prep, "I think

teachers help you because they give you tutoring and they're convenient because they can

be like 'come after school, like in the morning or on the weekends' to help you." A

parent trustee links teachers' dedication to her child's drive to succeed:

> I think what motivates the children at the school level is such a personal
> relationship that they have with their teachers and co-directors and anyone
> in the school. As for my daughter, I know that what pushes her is her
> dedication with her teachers. She sees that her teachers do not only let her
> do what's the normal. They want her to do what's more. And when she has
> someone who believes in her in that structure, she believes in . . . and so
> their self-esteem is built in through their faculty, and that's what pushes
> them to go forward.

Demands on teachers like those Roxbury Prep places on its staff are a source of concern

to some charter researchers, such as SRI (1997),UCLA (1998), Burian-Fitzgerald,

Luekens, and Strizek (2004), and Miron and Nelson (2002), who suggest that the

effectiveness of charter school teachers is diminished by excessive non-instructional

responsibilities and confusion about their responsibilities. Roxbury Prep seems to be

challenging this view by making a commitment to working extraordinarily hard a

prerequisite for joining the staff and building a staff culture where a willingness to work

extra hours or on the weekend is understood to be an extension of the collective

commitment to the school's mission – what "you buy into" as a member of the staff

"family."

Interestingly, Roxbury Prep's school leaders have accepted that a faculty of smart,

driven, typically young teachers willing to work "24/7" may translate into teacher

attrition over time and try to tailor school systems to ensure continued success in spite of

the attrition. Co-Director Phillips explains, "We're hiring a very highly intellectual,

energetic, entrepreneurial group of people. So for them to want to stay in one profession

doing one thing for 15 - 20 years is just unlikely, and I feel with our generation, that's just

unlikely." Of the teachers who leave, Phillips adds "…what they're doing is they're

teaching here for three or four years, going back and getting their Ph.D., going back and getting their masters, becoming school leaders, becoming directors of curriculum and instruction at other schools, starting other charter schools in other parts of the country, and I feel like that's great." The RPCS Renewal Application describes the departures over the school's first three years of operation – the data reflect that attrition was actually quite minimal (i.e., 1 teacher in the first year, 3 teachers in the second year, and 3 teachers in the third year) and that teachers – with one exception – left not to teach in other schools, but for other professional opportunities (p. 13). *Innovations in Education: Successful Charter Schools* describes RPC's strategy for minimizing the impact on school efficacy of staff turnover:

> As dedicated as the young teachers are who come to Roxbury Prep, the work load is grueling. Comparing it to the intensity experienced by recent college graduates at high-powered management consulting firms, the school's co-directors recognize that their young teachers, who 'come early and stay late,' cannot be expected to remain for years and years. To compensate for the expertise that leaves with each departing teacher, the school has developed systems to retain evolving curriculum knowledge, storing it in school databases and passing it on from one teacher to the next. (p. 14)

The summer curriculum development period and Friday professional development time are important mechanisms for ensuring uniform expectations throughout the faculty. The RPCS Charter Renewal Inspection Report notes, "Interviews with teachers and administrators revealed that this consistency across classrooms comes from cooperative planning. All teachers attend a paid, three-week summer in-service that is devoted in part to preparing instructional materials. They also meet [in] weekly department and Inquiry Group meetings in which they share 'best practices' and discuss common expectations" (p. 14). Fullan (2002) argues that two important qualities of successful principals are the ability to understand the change process and the ability to engage in knowledge sharing

and creation. Both these qualities are reflected in the Roxbury Prep school leaders'

approach to staff turnover – take it as a given and adapt to it with systems that preserve

organizational learning and facilitate smooth transitions.

Curriculum & Instruction

Standards-Based Curriculum Planning & Assessment. RPC's curriculum

development systems reflect the value the school places on accountability for achieving

academic proficiency. The RPC charter application emphasizes the relationship between

the school's standards and student promotion, declaring, "Student objectives for each

grade level will be published and sent to parents prior to the start of each school year.

Students must demonstrate mastery of these objectives in order to proceed to the

following grade level" (RPC Application for a Public School Charter, p. 2). Since the

summer before the school opened, teachers have met for at least three weeks each

summer to create and refine the school's curricula and assessments – a requirement of

working at Roxbury Prep that could not be imposed in a traditional Boston district school

under the terms of the city's collective bargaining agreement with the Boston Teachers

Union. In its application for charter renewal, RPC explains, "Teachers use standards

from the Massachusetts state frameworks, Advanced Placement exams, Core Knowledge,

and other nationally recognized sources to establish specific, rigorous, clear, measurable,

and manageable academic standards that clearly define what each student should know

and be able to do upon completion of each unit of each course" (RPC Application for

Charter Renewal, p. 1). The tool teachers use for this process, the Curriculum Alignment

Template (see Figure 4.1), lays out the school standards for each course, the activities in

which students will engage to learn each standard, the assessments that will be used to

measure students' progress toward the standard, and which standard (if any) from the

Massachusetts state frameworks, Stanford 9 (a nationally normed standardized test used

by the school to assess student basic skills progress), or ISEE/SSAT (standardized tests

required for admission to private, parochial, or Boston public exam high schools) is

addressed by the given RPC standard.

Figure 4.1 Sample Roxbury Prep Curriculum Alignment Template.

8th Grade Science

RPC Standard #	Clear and Measurable Standard/Benchmark (what will students know or be able to do?)	Learning Activities	Assessment (questions or activities)	MA Standard
1.2	Students will review the natural processes affecting the earth including sediments, rock formation, erosion, and weathering. Students will be able to use these concepts to discuss the age of the Earth.			
1.2.1	Students will be able to describe the layers of the Earth using the 3 layer and 5 layer system.	Structure of the Earth notes. Students will work in pairs to create a 3 part and 5 part model (play-doh) and answer questions on each model.	Earth structure and continental drift quiz	Earth and Space 2
1.2.2	Students will be able to describe the theory of continental drift and explain how tectonic plates move.	Continental Drift notes.	Earth structure and continental drift quiz	Earth and Space 5
1.2.3	Students will be able to define and differentiate between mechanical and chemical weathering. Students will be able to give examples of each type of weathering.	Weathering notes. Students will clean pennies with lemons to model acid precipitation. Students will freeze water to model ice wedging.	weathering stations in the lab	Earth and Space 6

1.2.4	Students will be able to explain and identify the parts of the rock cycle.	Rock cycle notes. Rock cycle modeling activity with play-doh.	Students will put the steps of the rock cycle in order given a list of steps.	Earth and Space 6
1.2.5	Students will be able to explain erosion and the importance of topsoil.	Lab: Which surface is more likely to erode? The original experiment will be comparing two different surfaces, one with plants and one without. We will simulate rain and runoff and see that the unprotected surface loses topsoil.	erosion lab report -- The students will then study ways of protecting soil and create their own "soil safe" environment on an aluminum baking sheet. We will test their design. For this, the 1st lab report, students will examine models of an A paper, a C paper and a failing paper.	

Once developed and/or revised, CATs are reviewed each summer by the Co-Director for

Curriculum & Instruction, department coaches, and each teacher's colleagues (either

within department or grade-level teams) both to provide feedback and facilitate vertical

articulation of standards and inter-disciplinary collaboration. This feedback process

facilitates at Roxbury Prep the kind of instructional coherence described by Newmann et

al. (2000). The RPCS Charter Renewal Inspection Report suggests that teachers see a

link between the ability to create their own curricula and student achievement:

> In general, teachers were not observed using textbooks or other
> published materials, although in a focus group they indicated that students
> had textbooks available at home for reading. Teachers also mentioned that
> they had created their own materials to better meet their students' needs...
> Teachers also mentioned creating their own materials because they found
> that published materials did not cover all of the specific content that they
> wanted to address. (p. 14)

The focus of Roxbury Prep teachers on developing materials that target the unique needs

of their students echoes Elmore's (1995) finding that effective instruction carefully

accounts for students' background knowledge and prior understandings. Once the CATs

are final and have been approved by the Co-Director for Curriculum & Instruction, they are used by teachers to develop the comprehensive assessments for each course; thus ensuring, as Shepard (2000) advocates, strong alignment between instruction and assessment. The comprehensive assessments are explained in the school's 2003-2004 annual report: "Roxbury Prep's rigorous college preparatory academic standards are translated into two comprehensive assessments: 1) a written assignment of project (e.g., lab report or essay) that reflects the content and skill standards of the class; and 2) a final exam that measures mastery of the course standards" (p. 12). The comprehensive assessments include the final exam and final project (given in both September and June to track student progress), as well as exams and projects for each trimester. Teachers' summer work – both structuring the curriculum for each course and designing the tools for assessing student learning in each course – is credited by teachers with cultivating a deep sense of academic urgency. One teacher explains, "And so when I come in August and I write my first trimester comprehensive assessment, I know where kids need to be by November and December. If it's October and I'm not on track, I'm very aware of that, and so it makes every day feel very important and every minute feel very important." For teachers and students, this sense of urgency is deepened by the fact that students' grades on comprehensive assessments account for 25% of each trimester's grade (12.5% for the exam and 12.5% for the project) and 25% of students' final grades for each of their courses. Moreover, students must pass the comprehensive assessments for each class in order to be promoted. If students do not pass one or two classes, they must attend summer school. If students fail more than two classes, students must repeat the grade.

<u>Data-Driven Instruction</u>. The comprehensive assessment system ensures not only

student accountability (since grades and promotion are based on what students know and

are able to do), but also staff accountability for student learning. The RPC charter

application explains, "If students are not meeting standards, teachers and administrators

will attempt to identify the root of the problem (i.e. insufficient time to master skills, lack

of student interest or motivation, poor teaching methods, etc.). If students appear to be

meeting standards with ease, teachers and administrators will raise the standards" (RPC

Application for a Public School Charter, p. 4). A teacher explains the staff's use of

assessment data by saying:

> I don't know any [other] place where teachers look at the exam that
> they've designed and given, and go through question by question. How
> many students got it right? How many students got it wrong? What did
> people choose otherwise, and they have to turn that in to the
> administrators of the school so they're accountable to the school.

The analysis of student performance that must be submitted after each administration of

the comprehensive assessments includes a requirement that teachers use the data on

student performance to identify standards that must be re-taught to the whole class,

standards that must be re-taught to small groups of students in tutoring, and standards

with respect to which students have achieved proficiency and may therefore be integrated

into periodic cumulative review. This exercise explicitly ensures that teachers view

student assessment data as feedback on their instruction and engage in the sort of

continuous reflection on student performance Darling-Hammond (1997) and Shepard

(2000) view as critical to effective instruction. This information is discussed in

department meetings, Inquiry Groups, grade-level team meetings, and meetings between

teachers and the co-director for curriculum & instruction, department chairs, and other

teachers. The 2002 DOE Site Visit Report for RPC confirms this description, "Evidence

given by teachers suggests that past student performance significantly impacts the curricular refinements and revisions that teachers and administrators make" (p. 2). The iterative process of teaching, assessing, revising curricular and instructional strategies, teaching, assessing, and so forth reflects the systematic approach to data Shepard (2000) believes is critical to school success in bridging the achievement gap.

Significantly, RPC's approach to the comprehensive assessments shapes how school staff look at the other assessments they give, including the Stanford 9 and the state-mandated MCAS. Co-Director Phillips, who taught 6th grade history at RPC before becoming co-director, explains the comprehensive assessment analysis process as follows,

> Basically the goal is to find out where, which students need to improve on which things and where do I as a teacher need to teach more of? ...We also do the same thing with the Stanford 9 and the MCAS, although that's a lot easier in that the testing companies give you item analysis of each question and the MCAS actually give a lot more detail than that. The Department of Education puts all of the previous tests on their website, gives you sample answers, answers that could be considered advanced, proficient, needs improvement, failing, so you know what to look for. So that's used as well. We analyze the data from all of the assessments and really, not just analyze it, but analyze in a way that's going to help us improve our teaching.

Consistent with Co-Director Phillips's description, the RPC Charter Renewal Inspection Report describes a Math department meeting – observed by the inspection team during their October 2003 visit – in which the Math department members discussed MCAS questions from the previous spring (for which student performance data had been recently released) on which many students had selected common wrong answers, and strategized together about how best to re-teach the relevant content (p. 17). Similarly, the RPC Charter Renewal Inspection Report notes that "in addition to Comprehensive Assessment, quizzes, and nightly homework, teachers' questioning strategies (such as

polling students for their answer choices or having students hold up index cards with their answers) allow teachers to gauge quickly which students understand a concept and which ones need further work. In the classes visited, teachers immediately used the results of a poll or check to reteach a concept if needed." (p. 15) A teacher summarizes the school's approach to curriculum and instruction by saying that "…we [the faculty] are constantly accountable by the students for what we do in the classroom and they are constantly accountable to us for what they do in the classroom." Although charter school skeptics – such as the authors of UCLA (1998) – might point out that teachers in traditional district schools could implement the very same data-driven instructional methods in place at Roxbury Prep, it is important to note that the ability of Roxbury Prep to build data-driven instruction into its charter, its hiring practices, its staff management systems, and its evaluation of staff means that the school is able, as Kane and Lauricella (2001) might predict, to achieve a higher degree of school-wide coherence around data-driven instruction.

In the design of both curricula and assessments, RPC is guided by its understanding of the school's accountability to the state for both student proficiency with respect to the state frameworks and fulfillment of the school's college preparatory mission. Co-Founder Rudall, Co-Director Phillips, and three of the teachers emphasized that the state frameworks are fundamental to the charter relationship between the state and RPC. Co-Director Phillips notes that although every teacher at the school may not "love" every aspect of the MCAS, the staff understands that it is the measure by which students and the school will be judged by the state. The school's commitment to alignment with the state frameworks is reflected in the RPC Application for Charter

Renewal, which explains, "Although every Roxbury Prep standard does not correspond to a Massachusetts standard, every unit addresses Massachusetts standards and every Massachusetts standard receives sufficient attention during the year" (p. 1). As described above, the format of the CATs –specifically, the column for indicating the Massachusetts framework standard to which the relevant RPC standard is connected – reflects this promise. So too does the format of the comprehensive assessments, which are aligned with the MCAS – the state's tool for assessing students' progress toward proficiency with respect to the state curriculum frameworks. However, all constituencies emphasize that alignment with the state frameworks and the MCAS is not tantamount to reducing the curriculum to test preparation. Co-Director Phillips explains:

> People ask me a lot, do our teachers teach to the test... And I say, 'Well, if that means that we spend the week or ten days before the MCAS cramming down our students' throats just to make sure that they do well on the MCAS, no, that is not what happens here. And if we did that, it probably wouldn't work. If that means aligning our curriculum with the state standards, you know, looking at the test, creating questions on comprehensive exams at Roxbury Prep that look similar to MCAS tests. If it means making sure that our students know the information that's going to be on the test, yeah, that is what we do.' But it's also what we're supposed to do. That's sort of state law.

A parent echoes this sentiment, saying:

> They're like preparing them from the beginning. What I love about it is the way the curriculum is done. It isn't . . . Again, Boston Public Schools says, 'Well we have to change our whole curriculum to teach for MCAS,' but it's [RPC's] not teaching for MCAS, it's teaching things they need to learn anyway and so that they're able to be successful when they take the MCAS... So it's not just preparing it for the test itself, but it's expanding their learning. ...They're preparing them different options of learning so that when it comes time to take the test, it's not just something, 'Oh I don't understand. I don't know where they're coming from.' It's things they've been learning throughout their curriculum. So it makes it easier for them to take the test.

RPC staff both embrace the state frameworks and the MCAS as important indicators of student academic proficiency and emphasize that their curriculum is intended to be, in

Co-Founder Rudall's words, "state standards plus." The "plus" is defined by the school's college preparatory mission and encompasses the background necessary for achieving proficiency in the state standards, additional academic content and skills teachers believe to be essential for success in high school and college, and the content and skills necessary to excel on high school entrance examinations like the SSAT and ISEE. A teacher notes that "I think a lot of people also elicit state standards and try to teach the state standards without recognizing the fact that they often need to teach everything that happens before the state standards…" and says of the Math instruction at RPC, "So when they [the students] come in 6th grade, they [the Math teachers] don't start with the 6th grade standards, they start with the 4th grade standards to make sure kids understand the procedural aspects of Math and also… the conceptual and the thinking parts of it." Thus, in its accountability plan – approved by the Massachusetts Department of Education Charter School Office – which sets out the criteria for renewal of the school's charter, RPC lists goals for student performance on the RPC comprehensive assessments, the MCAS, the Stanford 9, and the SSAT as well as high school placement, high school graduation, college matriculation, sophomore re-enrollment in college, and college graduation.

Consistent Observation & Feedback. In addition to the systems RPC has developed to ensure teacher accountability for the development of curricula and assessment consistent with the school mission, the school has also developed systems to ensure accountability for day-to-day instruction. In its application for charter renewal, RPC indicated that the Co-Director for Curriculum & Instruction "visits every class minimally once each week and provides feedback to teachers on a regular basis" (RPC

Application for Charter Renewal, p. 1). The RPC Charter Renewal Inspection Report

confirms this assertion: "[T]he co-director for curriculum and instruction observes

weekly in each class and provides immediate, specific feedback and suggestions for

opportunities for professional growth. The feedback often leads to changes in instruction

or curriculum" (p. 18). The school's academic systems – curriculum developed in the

summer, comprehensive assessments, the common blackboard configuration, and weekly

syllabi – support teacher preparation. Indeed, even a student was impressed enough by

teachers' preparation level to comment "Another thing is the teachers, because they listen

and they're always prepared. Like there's never a time when like a teacher says, 'Oh I

forgot to make today's homework,' or something." Beyond co-director instructional

leadership, teachers hold each other accountable for the quality of instruction through

reflection, collaborative planning, and peer observation. A teacher notes, "Myself and

the History teacher and Math teacher meet every day to talk about how our classes went

and talk about what we're doing the next day. I think in other schools that would be a big

deal because, 'A' they probably wouldn't have a schedule that would facilitate that, and

'B' people really wouldn't necessarily do that because they wouldn't see it as a good use

of time." Another teacher explains, "Informal feedback is constantly happening. People

are in your class all the time offering instant feedback. I ask teachers to stop in and let me

know what they think about 'x' in this lesson, so it's just, again it's just the environment

of the school that allows for that constant feedback." The collaborative culture around

curriculum and instruction at Roxbury Prep is another manifestation of the instructional

coherence Newmann et al. (2000) found to be essential in urban schools achieving

superior results.

Making Curricular Content Relevant. The cultural responsiveness of curriculum

and instruction at Roxbury Prep is driven by a vision for how to advance achievement.

The RPC charter application emphasizes, "Studies are made relevant through themes

connected to students' lives... Such themes connect the disciplines and provide context,

but do not threaten the objectives established for each course" (RPC Application for a

Public School Charter, p. 3). Citing Linda Darling-Hammond's argument in *The Right to*

Learn, the RPC application explains "RPCS's founders believe that students are more

likely to achieve objectives when connections are made between course work and issues

relevant to students' lives" (RPC Application for a Public School Charter, p. 3). Within

this context, teachers describe a commitment to multicultural education. For example,

the RPC Charter Renewal Inspection Report notes, "One teacher cited leveling books on

her own for use in guided reading because published lists of leveled books did not reflect

adequate ethnic diversity of authors or characters" (p. 14). One parent describes teachers

as culturally and socially aware in their approach to students, explaining that teachers are

effective because:

> The fact that they are down to earth and because, as one of the parents
> said, they live in urban neighborhoods, they're used to urban kids and they
> understand what they go through at home, the lack of things. I thought
> they understand and they add to their life. If they feel like there's
> something missing at home, they'll bring it in. They'll add to it, they'll add
> to it on the weekends.

Co-Director Phillips emphasizes that awareness of students' experience is a critical factor

in screening teacher candidates, Phillips explains that Roxbury Prep looks for:

> some type of experience working with our kids, with our type of kids,
> with our population of student. It is going to be very difficult for us, and
> this is sort of the 'Are we culturally responsive?' question, it's going to be
> very difficult for us to have somebody who taught at Milton Academy for .
> . . nothing against Milton, it's a great school, we want to send our kids
> there . . . but somebody who's taught at Milton for two years, has never

worked with students of color, comes from a totally different background, comes from a totally different environment, it's going to be difficult for them to teach at Roxbury Prep.

Similarly, Co-Founder Rudall sees urban experience as a significant asset for Roxbury Prep teachers "We find that those who are most successful at Roxbury Prep have either taught in urban public schools, or attended urban public schools, or grew up in an urban environment." A teacher noted that Roxbury Prep allocates time in the summer to discussions of the implications of race, class, and students experiences growing up in the city for instruction:

> I would say that we're aware that we're working with students of color and there's an awareness of that around curriculum planning in August. It's just one element but we do have a workshop around the Delpit articles every year, and we talk about her research about teaching students of color and how that may look different from teaching suburban White counterpart. I think there's definitely an awareness about that in terms of race, but there's also an awareness around class as well.

Thus, Roxbury Prep seems to be quite systematic in combating the disidentification with school that worries Ogbu and Simons (1998), Steele (1992), and Steele and Aronson (1998) through its efforts to connect curriculum and instruction to kids' life experiences, to recruit teachers with urban experience who can connect with students, and to ensure that the staff is reflective about issues of race and class. However, one teacher worried that the school did not do enough to prepare students for the transition from their communities and schools made up predominantly of people of color to white social, educational, and professional contexts: "[O]ur kids are going to leave from here and they're going to go into a White culture. That's not something that we necessarily prepare them for."

School Culture

Culture of Order and Respect. In describing the RPC school climate, the 2002

DOE Site Visit Report for RPC states, "A culture of order and respect is cultivated and

students are expected to adhere to it. As one student put it, 'When you aren't allowed to

get away with little things, there is no way for the big things to happen'" (p. 5). The

RPCS Student & Family Handbook includes a detailed code of conduct and uniform

policy and describes a system of progressively stringent consequences for misconduct.

The school uses a demerit system wherein students receive a demerit for minor

misconduct (e.g., failing to complete a homework assignment, disrupting class). If a

student receives three demerits in a week, the student must serve detention after school

from 4:15 PM to 5:30 PM, during which the student may only read silently. If a student

receives six demerits in a week, the student must serve a second after-school detention.

Finally, if a student receives nine demerits in a week, the student must serve an extended

detention after school on Friday afternoon from 1:20 PM to 4:00 PM. More serious

misconduct may result in automatic assignment of detention, required school service,

Saturday school, or out-of-school suspension. All of Roxbury Prep's written materials

explain the school's disciplined culture – with its strict student accountability for

behavior – as a prerequisite for academic results. For example, the 2003-2004 Annual

Report for RPC states, "In order to ensure high academic standards, Roxbury Prep

maintains high personal standards. The school requires a dress code and enforces a strict

code of conduct in which misbehavior is not tolerated" (p. 2). While many schools may

have strict rules and uniforms, Roxbury Prep is explicit about the relationship between

these choices and students' experiences in the classroom. Co-Director Phillips explains

the significance of the school's discipline policy by saying:

> So they [the students] feel safe physically but I also think they feel
> emotionally where they can come and they can take risks in class. They
> can raise their hand in class and not fear sort of being made fun of because
> they know that there will be consequences for the person if they make fun
> of them, but also, taking risks is what we want them to do. We want them
> to try to accomplish as much as they can in class. Sometimes that requires
> them taking risks.

The sense of safety – both physical safety and the emotional safety to embrace academic

risk taking – Phillips describes is a key characteristic of the cultures Hill, Foster, and

Gendler (1990) and Darling-Hammond (1997) see as essential for improved academic

outcomes for urban students. Teachers echo Phillips's sentiment; one teacher says of

Roxbury Prep that it provides "structure like you've never seen before, [and] that allows

you to teach a full period to every class and work with amazing people and amazing

kids." The team that prepared the RPC Charter Renewal Inspection Report observed that

the school's structure does in fact yield the intended academic climate: "The focus in all

classrooms at RPCS is clearly on learning rather than discipline. Classroom management

is clear and consistent across the school." (p. 14) In addition, the RPCS Charter Renewal

Inspection Report notes, "The climate supports academic risk and participation.

Inspection team members observed students who freely (and respectfully) disagreed and

defended an answer that was different from those given by the rest of the class" (p. 19).

Interestingly, even students, while expressing some discomfort with the uniform policy

and the school's strict rules, seem to recognize the relationships between the school's

code of conduct, uniform, and academic mission. One student said simply, "But the

reason why I know we have uniforms is so people will be focused more on work than on

other people's clothes." Similarly, the RPCS Charter Renewal Inspection Report noted:

> In focus group interviews, for example, students commented that
> wearing required uniforms helps them focus attention on academics. This
> expectation has quickly been internalized: one girl mentioned that she
> removed her earrings because she thought they might distract others.
> Hearing middle-school-aged students make statements like this helped the
> Team understand the mission in action and seemed to exemplify a climate
> in which students make decisions that encourage growth. (p. 18)

Another student added, "[E]very time there's a problem or like something's bugging you,

you can always talk to somebody. If something happened before school that you weren't

comfortable with, you can always talk to somebody to make you safe." The sense that

teachers won't let things fall through the cracks also cultivates an environment where

students feel supported academically. A student notes, "Another thing is that teachers

here, they always kind of watch out for you. I remember when I was failing History class,

she would always call my house every day to tell my mother that I need to come to

tutoring. So teachers here really care about the students." There are echoes of Perry's

(2003) description of pre-*Brown* segregated African-American schools in these

descriptions of Roxbury Prep's embodiment of an ethic of care.

Parents express support for the disciplined culture at RPC because they believe it

translates into safety for their kids. One parent explains, "There's zero tolerance for

behavior so you know you can't get away with anything. That was my main fear of

middle school." The RPCS Charter Renewal Inspection Report notes, "Parents reported

that one of the most appealing aspects of the school was that they knew their children

were physically safe" (p. 20). Parents also see a connection between school staff holding

students accountable for their behavior and a sense of familial trust between school staff

and students. Speaking of the school's co-directors, one parent notes:

> If there's a problem, they address it right, there and then. Next day is a
> new day. I appreciate the fact that they're consistent and that they are . . .
> it's like they are . . . I don't want to say dads, but in a way they are kind of.

There's a lot of students here who may not have dads. But I do feel like they're strong men and I think they can play a great role as far as what a man should be in life, and I feel like a lot of young men in this school can really learn a lot from them. They don't sway; they're strict. But they really love these kids.

In a similar vein, a parent says of her child's 6ᵗʰ grade Math teacher, "Even Ms. Saenz who's very strict but in such a loving way. You felt her care for your child." Another parent says of students views on teachers at Roxbury Prep:

They feel like they have a friend, not just a teacher. They know that there's a teacher, but there's also a friend they can confide in, people that they trust. And it makes them want to go to school because they are safe and because they know if there's any issues, they don't have to wait for someone to pry it out of them. There are people there who they can just openly confide in. That's a huge motivation other than set aside schoolwork.

In addition to "loving" strictness, accountable talk – saying what you mean and meaning what you say – is a feature of the school's discipline systems that parents greatly appreciate and an additional source of trust. In explaining how Roxbury Prep differs from other public schools, one parent emphasizes, "I would say consistency. I think that they're consistent with their rules. From day one they've been consistent, whereas other schools may start to sway..." Another parent adds, "Sometimes kids will try to play the teachers against the parents, however, because that communication line is open, there's no way it can happen here." Significantly, the trust that parents have in the school, as Bryk and Schneider (2002) would predict, translates into a sense of partnership with the school and accountability for their role in their children's education.

Parent & Family Engagement. When asked to discuss the role of parents at RPC, one parent explains, "A big role. That's one thing that I also love about this school is the expectation of parents. Participation, which again compared to Boston Public Schools, if you create an atmosphere where parents are needed, are expected, we will step up to the

plate." As with discipline, family involvement is consistently connected to academic achievement in RPC's written materials – an illustration of the kind of self-conscious identification of the school community with achievement that Perry (2003) advocates. For example, family accountability for students' homework completion is emphasized in the RPC charter application: "Each night, through the 8th grade year, RPCS parents/guardians are expected to check homework..." (RPC Application for a Public School Charter, p. 6). To facilitate parents checking homework, RPC places the homework on the voice mail of the school each night. Parents (and/or students) need only press a button for the student's grade-level to hear the night's assignments read by the Office Manager. In addition to the Homework Hotline, the school communicates with parents via weekly calls from teachers who serve as students' advisors, calls regarding detention or other disciplinary consequences, monthly academic progress reports that list every assignment given in each class and what grade the student received, a Family Involvement Committee that meets monthly and serves as a forum for discussing students' academic and social development, grade-level and school-wide social and academic events for families, and frequent calls from teachers who are each provided with their own telephone and voice mail account. The RPC Charter Renewal Inspection Report notes, "The school supports parent as productive learners as well, fostering communication with techniques such as the homework hotline. One parent reported calling a teacher at night for help in understanding the homework in order to assist the student" (p. 21). Recounting parents' perspective on Roxbury Prep, the Massachusetts 2020 report notes, "One parent explained his surprise at receiving a call from a teacher about the strong progress his son was making. 'I was shocked. I couldn't

believe she took the time to call me for that. I thought she was calling because he was in

trouble.'" (p. 34) The school's aggressive outreach to parents has created a culture in

which parents feel that their participation is non-negotiable, leading one parent to

observe:

> Involvement is . . . you have to be involved as a parent. It's like you don't
> have a choice. They don't really give you a choice. You get a calendar in
> the beginning of the year and it tells you . . . plus there's a lot of events. . .
> so the kids want to participate, so you have to be there to . . . be there for
> encouragement for your job. And when your child is doing or is off-
> balance or whatever, they let you know. The advisory teachers will call
> just like every two weeks, you know, 'What's going on? How's she doing?
> How's he doing?' We get progress reports to let you know where your
> child stands. 'OK, well I think you need to come up in this way or that
> way.' We're always notified of anything. If you're child's out, they call,
> 'Why isn't your child in school?' Other schools, they don't care whether
> your child comes to school or not. So it's caring and if you care about your
> kids, you'll be here.

A critical part of the school's strategy for engaging students' families is a thorough

orientation to the school that begins with the information sessions parents attend prior to

applying for the lottery, continues through a spring full-day orientation workshop after

students are initially admitted, and continues through annual August orientation

workshops and September family nights (at which parents follow their children's

schedules for the evening and are oriented to each of their children's classes) for each

grade level. For example, Co-Director Phillips emphasizes the importance of orienting

parents to the school's high expectations for homework: "We give 2 1/2 hours of

homework every night. That's just a lot different for parents, considering what they're

used to, in many cases--not all cases--but many cases. It takes a lot of getting used to."

The message of family involvement is so strongly bound together with the school's

articulation of its mission that parents understand themselves as partners with their

children in fulfilling the mission, leading one parent to comment, "So both of the parent

and the child have a sacrifice and a commitment so your child can do well. And with you being here for meetings or whatever's going on, children are always watching the parents. So if they see the parent into it, they'll get into it."

Exposure to Life's Possibilities. Beyond striving to provide academic rigor supported by an orderly environment and engaged families, RPC seeks to expose students to what the mission statement calls "life's possibilities" through an after-school enrichment program, school-sponsored enrichment activities after school, on Saturdays, and during the summer, a Friday advisory curriculum, and a Friday community meeting. The enrichment program takes place from 3:10 PM to 4:15 each afternoon Monday through Thursday and is mandatory for all students. According to the RPCS 2003-2004 annual report, "Roxbury Prep's Enrichment program ensures that students remain engaged in productive and healthy activities during a time period traditionally neglected by urban public schools" (p. 23). Through the enrichment program students may enroll in trimester-long classes in Tae Kwon Do, guitar, dance, competitive sports (e.g., soccer, basketball), musical theater, percussion, mixed media art, and computer web design as well as other artistic and athletic courses. The after-school enrichment program is supplemented by additional after-school and Saturday enrichment activities that include science club, book clubs, taking all students on visits to college campuses, tours of local museums, a ski trip for honor roll students, attending a jazz concert, and going sailing on the Charles River (see the 2003-2004 RPCS Annual Report, p. 25-26). One student commented about the Roxbury Prep approach to these field trips, "So every single time you go on a field trip, you at least learn something new every day, which you're supposed to do in life. Basically, learn something new every single day." During the summer, in

addition to an intensive remedial summer program for struggling students, Roxbury

Prep's Director of High School Placement works to place students in summer enrichment

programs – some with Roxbury Prep-funded scholarships. These summer experiences

can include such activities as space camp in Alabama, outward bound, and summer

academic programs on elite private secondary school campuses or college campuses (see

the 2003-2004 RPCS Annual Report,p. 26). Contrasting Roxbury Prep's enrichment

offerings with other urban public schools, a teacher says, "I think we give kids more

opportunities than any other public school that I've seen. Kids are always going and doing

something with somebody and we can't program enough... kids eat that up. They want

that. It's helpful to parents who are working so much. They want a safe place for their

kids to have fun and also be able to try new experiences." The RPCS Charter Renewal

Inspection Report explains "Through opportunities such as field trips and summer camp

scholarships, the school is brining into reach experiences that might not otherwise be

available to many of its students. In this way, many are getting a taste of 'life's

possibilities.'" (p. 22) Participation in these activities has the effect of more deeply

embedding students in the school community and fostering the kind of strong

relationships between teachers and students that Darling-Hammond (1997) and Steele

(1992) believe enhance teacher effectiveness.

The Advisory Curriculum and Friday Community Meeting serve as both vehicles

for enrichment and instructional tools to cultivate student character as articulated in the

Roxbury Prep School Creed, which reads:

> To prepare students for success in college and beyond, the Roxbury Prep
> community adheres to the following values:
> • Scholarship: We think critically and aspire to and achieve academic
> excellence

- Integrity: We are honest and ethical in our words and our actions.
- Dignity: We have self-respect and honor our heritages.
- Responsibility: We are accountable for our decisions and our actions.
- Perseverance: We are resourceful, work hard, and always strive to do our best.
- Community: We use our talents to make positive contributions to our communities.
- Leadership: We act on the principle that if we are not part of the solution, we are part of the problem.
- Peace: We resolve conflicts with compassion and help others to do the same.
- Social Justice: We endeavor to make our society more just.
- Investment: We are reflective, act with foresight, and invest in our futures.(2003-2004 RPCS Annual Report, p. i)

The values in the School Creed are discussed and celebrated throughout the school culture – particularly through Creed Deeds. Creed Deeds are a complement to the demerit system and serve as merits – markers of students doing the right thing – that are tabulated and may be used at monthly Creed Deed Auctions to redeem prizes like gift certificates to Barnes and Noble or lunch with a teacher and a friend. The RPC Charter Renewal Inspection Report explains, "Students who display positive behavior are awarded Creed Deeds. For example, the first student to answer a question correctly in a science class receives Creed Deeds, in support of the core value of Scholarship. The core value of Respect is quickly reinforced in another class a student who snickers at another's incorrect response receives a demerit." (p. 15) The Advisory class that takes place on Fridays is organized around the elements of the Roxbury Prep creed. The RPC application for charter renewal emphasizes that the most important function of the Advisory curriculum is to teach students that "success in life means not only being a good student, but being a good person as well." (RPC Application for Charter Renewal, p. 3). However, Advisory is about more than just a weekly character education lesson – students' advisors are the first teachers they see each morning, they are the teachers who

respond to what students write in their Drop Everything And Read journals (where they reflect on their independent reading, and the teachers who communicate weekly with their parents. A parent says of the relationship between a student, the student's family, and the student's advisor: "[It] is such a plus. It's like the guidance counselor for your child, even though they have more than one child, they're so accessible to your needs that it's almost like your child's the only one. " In addition to Friday advisory class, Fridays are also the days when the entire school community gathers for an end-of-week assembly – which is student-led and features academic and enrichment presentations intended to celebrate the values in the school creed. The RPC Charter Renewal Inspection Report notes that, "Students take pride in receiving special recognition at a weekly school community meeting, for positive actions." Community meeting is a part of what a teacher describes as a Roxbury Prep "culture that says to kids that is it OK to be smart, and you are rewarded for performing well academically." The rituals associated with a school creed, the advisory curriculum, community meeting, and Drop Everything And Read are very consistent with the kind of rituals Perry (2003) advocates as vehicles for helping students identify with academic achievement and the values – like persistence and hard work – that facilitate achievement.

Collaborative Staff Culture. The Roxbury Prep student and family culture is supported by a collaborative staff culture – what Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995) would call a true "professional community." In its charter application, RPC explained that charter school autonomy in hiring would mean that the school would be "free to hire teachers and administrators who are willing to be reflective about their teaching practices and to collaborate in order to ensure student academic achievement"

(RPC Application for a Public School Charter, p. 1). The school's teamwork approach to curriculum and instruction is also emphasized in the school's charter application, which describes the time teachers will spend working together in the summer and anticipates that "teachers will work in grade-level teacher-teams to refine established student standards for each class, further develop the school's scope and sequence, develop units that integrate skills and content, refine assessment rubrics, and ensure that student standards are reflected in the grade-level and subject goals, integrated units, daily lessons, and assessments" (RPC Application for a Public School Charter, p. 4). This promise has translated into three hours on Friday afternoons dedicated to teacher team-work, of which the Massachusetts 2020 report says, "Teachers at Roxbury Prep find this time on Friday afternoons highly productive and feel strongly that it helps them to hone their craft". The 2002 DOE Site Visit Report for RPC indicates "The atmosphere among the faculty is collegial, with a permeating cultural norm of working together as a team." (p. 5) Similarly, the RPCS Charter Renewal Inspection Report emphasized the strength of collegiality among the staff: "One teacher commented in a teacher focus group, 'You don't teach in isolation here. Look at the schedule – it allows common planning time. You could work 70 to 80 hours a week anywhere, but would you want to?' Her tone, corroborated by the nodding heads around the group, clearly indicated that this is a place where she does not mind working long hours because of the opportunities for strong communication and professional support among peers." (p. 16) Common instructional strategies also reflect the high degree of teacher collaboration. All teachers at the school utilize a common blackboard configuration comprised of a "Do Now," the "Aim" for the day's lesson, the lesson "Agenda," and the "Homework" assignment due at the start of

the next class meeting. The RPCS Charter Renewal Inspection Report notes, "Weekly syllabi given to students reflect the same organization as the classroom board configuration and teachers' lesson plans, There are no hidden surprises for students; expectations are clearly laid out" (p. 17). The RPC faculty has adopted, as the RPC Charter Renewal Inspection Report explains, "common writing strategies that emphasize grammatical precision, the use of multiple drafts, and continuous revision to ensure that student writings are well organized, clear, and articulate" (p. 5). Roxbury Prep teachers also have a coordinated approach to reading using the Guided Reading model developed by Fountas and Pinnell for Reading classes and "an adapted version of guided reading that allows math, science, and history teachers to provide a structured, consistent approach with which students can engage texts" (RPCS Charter Renewal Inspection Report, p. 5). The school's comprehensive assessment system is also utilized for collaborative work: "Teachers also use Comps data as a tool for professional development, both in Inquiry Group discussions of student work and in department meetings on common expectations (e.g., English teachers scoring a set of essays with a common rubric and analyzing similarities and differences in their assessment of the essays.)" (RPC Application for Charter Renewal, p. 2) Moreover, the RPCS Charter Renewal Inspection Report notes that "giving teachers a voice in selection of new staff has built a professional staff who share a common style, language, vision and commitment" (p. 23).

Effective collaboration at Roxbury Prep extends beyond the staff to the school's Board. Like students, parents, and staff, the Roxbury Prep Board of Trustees has a strong culture of accountability for the school's mission. For example, at Roxbury Prep, even

trustee governance is something to be worked at collaboratively. The RPC application for charter renewal explains that "After extensive working sessions with the Massachusetts Charter School Resource Center's Strengthening Boards of Trustees Project, the Roxbury Prep Board assumed new levels of responsibility. Although the Board remained committed to avoiding micromanagement and maintaining a clear division between management and governance, the Board established several working committees that have accomplished numerous tasks" (RPC Application for Charter Renewal, p. 13). The Finance Committee meets monthly to review the school's financial statements and is charged with developing the school's annual budget. The Student Achievement Committee, as described in the RPC application for charter renewal, "monitors the progress of Roxbury Prep students toward the academic standards in the Roxbury Prep Accountability Plan using standardized test scores, grades, comprehensive assessments, and other measures of student progress" (RPC Application for a Public School Charter, p. 14). The Co-Director Evaluation Committee is responsible for preparing the annual written evaluation of the performance of the school leaders. The Trusteeship Committee, in addition to nominating and orienting new members, is charged with holding current trustees accountable through a trustee evaluation process. Trustees see their committee work as directly linked to advancing the school's mission. Asked how they might describe work on the Board to prospective trustees, three of the four trustees interviewed all focused on student outcomes. One trustee said:

> [I] would let him or her know that this is a unique opportunity to directly
> impact, positively impact the futures of not only several hundred young
> men and women in the greater Boston area, but also to play a critical role
> in education choice and development of educational systems that benefit
> all and exclude none. And a chance to frankly be part of a winning project,

a winning team, a group of people who are singularly dedicated to the development, advancement, success of these young men and women.

Another trustee offered, "It's just tremendous to see the kids that come into the school in 6th grade that are three grade levels below where they should be, and they leave the school a couple of grade levels above where they 'should be.' So the progress and the effort that's given there is phenomenal and it's certainly well worth the time and money."

Asked to summarize the role of the Board, a trustee explained:

> I think our responsibility is to make sure that the Roxbury Prep
> continues on the path to meet its mission, that we are able to help the
> school and its administrators acquire the resources necessary for the
> school to meet its mission--for us to meet our mission. It's also our
> responsibility to ensure, from a 10,000 foot level I suppose, that the
> operations of the institution are running smoothly and that we are in fact
> serving our community and meeting the mission.

Even as they emphasized the Board's accountability for the school fulfilling its mission, trustees also distinguished between their governance-level accountability and the co-directors' accountability for management of the school – signaling that Roxbury Prep's board and school leaders have worked out the kind of constitutional governance Korach (1995) describes. One trustee pointed out, "We're certainly responsible for the fiscal stability of the school and for the oversight of what's happening at the school. But again, I emphasize oversight and not management. The directors are the people who manage the school."

Summary

The key constituencies at Roxbury Prep trace the school's use of its autonomy with respect to budget, staffing, curriculum and instruction, and school culture directly to the school's mission to prepare students to enter, succeed in, and graduate from college.

These constituencies understand bridging the achievement gap to be a prerequisite for accomplishing that mission.

In establishing its budget, Roxbury Prep has committed its resources to: small school size, small classes, extended learning time, professional development, and high school placement and graduate services. For the key constituencies at Roxbury Prep, small school size and class size are linked not only to the closer relationships among staff and students (Greenwald, Hedges, & Laine, 1996; Darling-Hammond, 1997) and greater attention to individual student needs (Finn & Achilles, 1999) cited by researchers, but also to a culture of transparent accountability for students and staff. Extended learning time – achieved through an extended school day, tutoring, and summer remediation and enrichment – is linked by the key constituencies at Roxbury Prep not only to the academic benefits of greater time on task (Davis & Thomas, 1989) and effective remediation (Shanahan, 1998) noted in the research literature, but to a culture in which students and teachers see a clear relationship between their time investment and student outcomes. Investments in professional development at Roxbury Prep, in the view of the school's key constituencies, are made in accordance with the school's other decisions about how to use its autonomy – just as the research (Sebring and Bryk, 2000; Newmann et al., 2001) would suggest. For example, the school's investment in over three weeks of curriculum development time each summer aligns with the school's commitment to standards-based curriculum planning. Roxbury Prep can be seen as responding to the concerns articulated by Ogbu and Simons (1998) and other researchers about African-American students disidentifying with school by investing in a high school placement and

graduate services staff that the school's key constituencies believe helps students see their path to college graduation and effectively counsels them on how to move along that path.

Roxbury Prep has used its autonomy with respect to staffing to implement a rigorous selection process, a careful system of staff evaluations, a co-director leadership model, and higher demands on teachers. For the school's key constituencies, Roxbury Prep's exacting procedures for recruiting and selecting teachers both illustrate the school's determination to maximize the quality of its teacher workforce (which Sebring and Bryk (2000) argue is critical to the success of school's serving low-income students) and the school's commitment to building a staff that is closely aligned philosophically. Although Roxbury Prep's thorough evaluation of teacher performance has allowed the school to terminate under-performers, just as charter advocates (Wilson, 1992; Nathan, 1999; and Finn et al. ,2000) hoped and researchers on schools achieving superior results for low-income students would anticipate (Sebring and Bryk, 2000), the more important by-product of the school's approach to evaluation may be what the Massachusetts 2020 report describes as "a culture of healthy critique and continuous improvement" (p. 32). Similarly, the school's key constituencies report that the co-director model at Roxbury Prep serves to ensure that the Co-Director for Curriculum & Instruction is able to focus exclusively on instruction and the relationships between staff, students, and families – indeed, he is able to be the instructional leader Elmore (1999) describes as critical for successful urban schools. Roxbury Prep's high demands on teachers – particularly with respect to the hours they must work each week – does risk the heightened rate of burn out or turnover Burian-Fitzgerald, Luekens, and Strizek (2004), and Miron and Nelson (2002) have observed in charter schools, but the school appears to have developed a

culture where the staff takes pride in the school's demanding expectations and where turnover is accounted for in the school's systems for training and instructional management.

In terms of curriculum and instruction, Roxbury Prep has adopted a standard-based approach to curriculum planning and assessment, a culture of data-driven instruction, a system of consistent observation and feedback by the instructional leader, and a focus on making the curriculum relevant for students. Roxbury Prep's system of Curriculum Alignment Templates (CATs) and Comprehensive Assessments ("Comps") seek to align the school's standards for what students should know and be able to do (including the Massachusetts standards for each subject), daily instructional activities, and assessment (both formative and formal). This systematic approach to curriculum development and assessment appears to achieve the instructional coherence identified by Newmann et al. (2000) as critical to school success, the tight link between what is taught and how student learning is measured that Shepard (2000) endorses, and the responsiveness of instruction to students' prior knowledge and skills that Elmore (1995) advocates. From quick polls at the end of a lesson to the comps and from nightly homework to state exams, all constituencies at Roxbury Prep emphasized the degree to which careful analysis of student performance on assessments – just as Shepard (2000) found in high-functioning schools – was a key driver in decisions about what and how to teach. For Roxbury Prep's key constituencies, frequent observation of teachers by the Co-Director of Curriculum & Instruction and follow-up conversations in-person or via e-mail serves as an important tool for ensuring not only quality teaching, but also the instructional coherence Newmann et al. (2000) identified as a key factor in school

efficacy. From reading a seminal article on race, class, and teaching by Lisa Delpit each year as a staff to selecting only teachers with urban experience, key constituencies at Roxbury Prep report that the school seeks to ensure instruction is relevant to students' lives. These efforts appear to be designed to maximize students' commitment to their learning in contrast to the fears expressed by Ogbu and Simons (1998), Steele (1992), and Steele and Aronson (1998) about frequent African-American student disidentification from school.

The school culture at Roxbury Prep reflects the decision to focus on: order and respect, parent and family engagement, exposing students to life's possibilities, and a collaborative staff culture. Hill, Foster, and Gendler (1990) and Darling-Hammond (1997) describe a sense of physical and emotional safety as central to developing an effective school. At Roxbury Prep, key constituencies report that a focus on discipline not only helps students feel safe, but maximizes student learning time while reinforcing the values in the school creed. According to Roxbury Prep's key constituencies, the school implements a variety of initiatives including a Family Involvement Committee and by-weekly teacher calls to every family in order to build the kind of trusting relationships between staff and families that Bryk and Schneider (2002) found essential to successful Chicago schools. Enrichment during the school year and the summer is viewed by Roxbury Prep's key constituencies as a critical driver of close relationships between staff and students (as Darling-Hammond (1997) and Steele (1992) would urge) and student investment in learning and identification with school (as Perry (2003) advocates). The language Roxbury Prep's key constituencies use to describe the staff culture echo the Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995) description of the

"professional community" necessary for school success. From collaborative curriculum planning in the summer to Friday afternoons dedicated to shared inquiry around instructional practice in subject-matter and grade-level teams, Roxbury Prep's staff appears to work closely together to refine their teaching.

Echoes of the research literature are evident throughout the Roxbury Prep case study. In the Neighborhood House and Academy of the Pacific Rim case studies similar echoes are present, and, ultimately, the analysis chapter identifies themes and patterns that emerge across the cases.

Neighborhood House Charter School

Introduction

The Neighborhood House Charter School was founded in 1995 by a community-based board affiliated with The Dorchester House, a multi-service social service agency, with a mission to "offer quality education to a diverse community of Boston children through a neighborhood-based school that integrates education with social services and health care programs for the benefits of students and their families that otherwise have limited educational opportunities" (NHCS 2004 Inspection Report, p. 1). A trustee notes that this mission translates into the school being "a full service school," an approach to education cited by the founding and current headmaster as central to his decision to join the school:

> What attracted me to Neighborhood House... was [connected to] a conversation I had in 1978 with the then Superintendent of Schools and me as the President of the Brookline Educators Association Union on what schools are going to look like in the future. He said, 'Schools are going to have day cares ... social services are going to come to schools; University healthcare [will be] coming and working with schools.' And that's when we were talking about full service schools back then. What attracted me was the whole child approach that this school was going to take. We're not just going to look at the academics, but they were going to look at...the healthcare and social services. Similarly to . . . not as grandiose as what Geoffrey Canada [of the Harlem Children Zone] is doing at Harlem . . . and so we're doing it on a much smaller scale and I'd like to do more of it because you... can't just change schools; you've got to change the environment that kids are living in.

The school's key constituencies – trustees, administrators, staff, and families – see the school's full service model, responsiveness to students' individual needs, and "family"

culture as critical to providing their historically underserved student population access to a broader range of opportunities.

In its publications, the school frequently describes its approach to fulfilling its mission by saying, "The school's 'Succeed Anywhere' educational philosophy proposes that all students of the NHCS will be well prepared to enter a high quality public or private secondary school, including schools focused on college preparation, technical trades, or the creative arts" (NCHS 2004 Annual Report, p. 2). The headmaster says of NHCS's commitment to continuous improvement "this is all based on narrowing the [achievement] gap." Similarly, a Board member says of his decision to join the NHCS Board, "There's a tremendous Black/White gap in our society and a good part of it is education. I'm looking at a schedule that says that Boston is part of the lowest 5% achievers [on] MCAS in the Commonwealth... So not only is there a problem with Black kids, they happen to be in a municipality that is virtually at the bottom of the pile. That's unsatisfactory. We have to take some steps to close that gap and Neighborhood House is clearly committed to doing that." The school's commitment to bridging the achievement gap– for its 68% students of color and 52% free and reduced price lunch eligible population as of 2002-03 – through a full-service model is reflected in its decisions on budget, staffing, curriculum and instruction, and school culture.

Budget

Small School, Small Classes. The central financial decision made in the development of Neighborhood House Charter School was the decision to be a small school. Student enrollment drives the NHCS budget because public funding through per-

pupil tuition from the state is invariably charter schools' largest source of funding. In conjunction with Neighborhood House's commitment to being a full-service school, the decision to serve such a small number of students drives the school's reliance on private fundraising to bridge the gap between revenue and expenses. As of 2005-2006, having recently moved to a new expanded facility, Neighborhood House Charter School served 330 students from Kindergarten-One through eighth grade (2006 NHCS Annual Report, p. 3). The NHCS middle school served only 85 students in grades 6-8 – a middle school less than 1/5 the size of the average Boston Public Middle School.[5] Each of the school's constituencies identifies the school's size as a critical factor in creating the school's "family" culture, to which they attribute much of the school's academic success. Of school size, the middle school dean comments, "None of our teachers teach more than 66 kids, so from a grading papers [standpoint] and managing sort of the things I think it's manageable compared to what you see at a lot of the bigger schools, particularly given the fact that our teachers have a number of planning periods each day that they can do some of that work." In linking the small student load to the ability for teachers to invest greater time in planning their lessons and assessing student work, the middle school dean echoes Miles (1995). She also notes, "I always talk about family because I think [NHCS] really does feel like a family community and I think that's largely because of our size." Similarly, when asked what Boston Public Schools could do to make their schools more like Neighborhood House, one parent responds, "I would say, jokingly tongue in cheek, tell them they'd better be prepared to build a whole lot more school buildings because one of the things is size and the size, in part, makes things manageable." She explains that "if

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[5] As of 2005-06, the average enrollment in a Boston Public School was 508 students. (See http://www.boston.k12.ma.us/schools/schlevel.asp.)

you get the size down, then you can impart vision, you can establish a culture more easily, expectations can be communicated, you know you'll know kids, you can develop relationships with kids and families." This parent's focus on the connection between the school size and the quality of relationships between school staff and both students and families is reminiscent of the claims of Darling-Hammond (1997) and Greenwald, Hedges, and Laine (1996) about the virtues of small schools.

With class size at 22 in the NHCS middle school and math computation taught in classes of 11, NHCS has committed substantial resources to keeping class size small because they believe the resulting individualized attention and family environment are key drivers of academic achievement.[6] The middle school dean explains "so in class there's no doubt that if you're teaching 11 kids you can individualize instruction a whole heck of a lot more than you can if you're 22, and at 22 you can do a lot better than if you're teaching 35, which is what I used to teach in California. I think it does make a big difference." The Headmaster shares this view, saying "I feel that class size, school size, does play an effect upon kids' academic success because you're dealing with familiarity, knowing kids and families better. If you get to know a child better, you get to know their strengths and weaknesses and you can address them in a better way." Echoing the views expressed by both the school's administrators, a teacher comments on the relationship between school and class size and the school's success in reaching students at risk of academic failure: "I think that the smallness of the school helps to be able to give more one on one time, which is wonderful for the student who I think that if they were at another middle school would get totally lost and not be successful." The key

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[6] As of the 2002-03 school year, average middle school class size within Boston Public Schools was 29. (See http://www.boston.k12.ma.us/bps/budget03/classsize.asp.)

constituencies at NHCS emphasize, as did Greenwald, Hedges, and Laine (1996) and

Achilles and Finn (1999), the relationship between school size, class size, and teachers'

ability to provide individualized instruction and attention.

More Time. Asked to explain the success of NHCS students on the MCAS, both

the headmaster and the middle school dean emphasized – as Davis and Thomas (1989)

would predict – more time on-task as a result of a longer school year, a longer academic

day, and after school programming. The headmaster comments "an extra hour in the

lower school, and hour and a half in the middle school makes a big difference and

separates us from other schools." The middle school dean emphasizes the importance of

tutoring during study halls and after school homework intervention to creating a culture

of achievement:

> There are also checks and balances for people who aren't achieving at
> the level we want them to. For example, kids who aren't on honor roll, if
> they fail to complete a homework assignment, they have to serve
> homework detention for the whole following week. If they're failing two
> classes for the quarter or the mid-quarter, even if they have completed all
> their homework assignments, they have to stay after school and work on
> their homework here. We have study halls that you're specifically assigned
> to if you've been kind of negligent in completing English assignments or
> Social Studies assignments. . . [T]he turnaround for us I think came when
> we instituted this homework detention policy because we went from really
> having. . . some kids working hard in their classes but not doing the whole
> picture, to kids who really . . . you know you'd see kids in their five extra
> minutes at the end of lunch working to get stuff get done. It changed the
> flavor of the school in terms of what expectations were for achievement.

Teachers see tutoring beyond the regular academic day as critical to accelerating

achievement. One teacher explains that after-school tutoring time is frequently used to

have students rewrite essays or re-do work not done well the first time to ensure that

students reach proficiency. She adds, "It's not just left up to them to just come if they

want to improve their grades, they actually need to do it with the idea that they don't

really know what's good for them, so we have to kind of show them." It is noteworthy

that teachers are doing the day-time and after school tutoring themselves which suggests

a higher level of tutor quality – a key feature of effective tutoring as described by

Shanahan (1998)– than might be possible if the school relied on volunteers or partner

agencies (e.g., City Year, Americorps). Another teacher notes, "We also have a summer

program that is focused on Language Arts and Math for students who struggle throughout

the year. It's a five week program."

Aligned Professional Development. NHCS has been careful to invest in

professional development aligned with its broader approach to curriculum and instruction

and targeted areas for improvement. Teachers describe the staff time invested in two

weeks of professional development each August as critical to building a climate of staff

collaboration. Activities they described included MCAS data analysis, discussions of

books they had agreed to read as a staff (including Yardsticks and Lisa Delpit's Other

People's Children), training through Research for Better Teaching (based on the research

of Jon Saphier), and curriculum planning. A teacher described one example of an August

initiative involving cross-grade and cross-subject collaboration:

> [W]e all took a look at the Math MCAS and we looked at different
> vocabulary in Math that the children might have trouble recognizing on
> the test when they took it. So we discussed how we could incorporate
> those words into other curriculum, into other subject areas so that would
> help the students learn the other vocabulary better and be able to recognize
> it.

Similarly, the school invests staff resources in one early dismissal afternoon a week for

professional development and co-planning which supports a collaborative staff culture.

The middle school dean says of Friday afternoon all middle school meetings, "someone

will bring a problem to people's attention, whether it's this percentage of kids are failing

7th Social Studies because they're not completing work, or these three kids are really not making progress because they can't write a sentence." Darling-Hammond (1998) and Birman et al. (2000) advocate precisely this kind of problem solving focused professional development. Expenditures on outside professional development appear to be aligned, as Sebring and Bryk (2000) and Newmann et al. (2001) would recommend, with areas the staff has agreed need improvement. For example, the middle school dean explains:

> Last year for the first time we implemented this Computation class in the
> 6th grade, which was an additional 3-day a week class that all our 6th
> graders got, and we were able to create a student-teacher ratio of 11 to 1
> for those classes. That combined with some professional development
> work in the area of Mathematics from a professor at BC [Boston College]
> along with some sort of fine tuning of what the curriculum actually looked
> like, really resulted in just a huge gain for us.

Similarly, the middle school science teacher explains that when she joined the staff, the administration was particularly interested in refining the middle school science curriculum to better address the Massachusetts standards and so "we received a grant and I hired a consultant from Cambridge Public Schools who's a mentor teacher and was instrumental in putting together the middle school Science curriculum there. So the [NHCS] scope and sequence of [Science] is based on the standards, but it's also based on the order that we should teach it so that one thing builds on the other."

Full-Service. The NHCS commitment to being a full-service school has significant financial implications: (1) the school has built into its staffing plan significant supports for struggling students, including special education students; (2) the school commits significant dollars to programming beyond the core academic day; and (3) the school aggressively courts partners to provide in-kind services. The headmaster describes the significant number of staff positions at the school dedicated to K-8 intervention services: "We have a lot of special needs help. Two full-time special needs

teachers, and probably hiring another intern... full-time speech and language, [and] three day a week occupational therapy." In the school's Fiscal Year 2005, full service programs accounted for about 9% of the school's total non-capital budget ($365,428). For example, NHCS is a federally-funded 21st Century Community Learning Center site, which means, according to the NHCS 2004 Annual Report, "[T]he school offers strong academic after- school and summer programs to its students, while providing a wide variety of extracurricular, social and health services to students and their families." The NHCS 2006 Annual Report lists the 21st Century Community Learning Center grant as a source of $90,000 in annual funding or roughly 1/5 of the state and federal grants received by the school beyond per pupil funding (NHCS 2006 Annual Report, p. 62). Although Heath and McLaughlin (1994) advocate for the creation of partnerships between schools and community based organizations to provide "all-day, all-year learning opportunities for youth," there is not a substantial body of research showing that charter schools who have partnered with community-based organizations have achieved superior results to those that have not. However, it may be that the NHCS full-service model works to support student achievement on two levels. On one level, students benefit from additional support, either from intervention teachers or from out-of-school time services. On a deeper level, the full-service model reflects a critical cultural message NHCS seeks to deliver – a message that the school will do everything possible to help its students succeed. That message may in fact help to overcome some of the anxieties described by Steele (1992) and Steele and Aronson(1998) and some of the skepticism about schools as institutions described by Ogbu and Simons(1998).

Private Funds for the School "Campus." The availability of only limited state

funding for school facilities is a unique challenge for charter schools nationally and

particularly for charter schools in Massachusetts. As part of the political compromise to

ensure passage of the original charter school legislation, charter schools were not granted

access to the state funds and bonding authority for school construction. NHCS has raised

a significant amount of private money for supporting its operating budget (particularly to

meet the demands of the full-service model) and for a capital campaign for the new

facility into which the school moved during the 2004-2005 school year. According to the

NHCS 2004 Inspection Report, "With the guidance of the Board of Trustees and a very

capable deputy headmaster, NHCS raised over $ 3 million in private and public funds to

meet its financial goals for the [2003-2004] school year." (p. 23) In speaking with the

Inspection Team, the "deputy headmaster attributed the school's successful fundraising

efforts to its willingness to aggressively court potential donors" (NHCS 2004 Inspection

Report, p. 23). Asked to describe a major challenge the school has overcome, the

headmaster describes the facilities capital campaign:

> Raising the funds to buy our own building. Because we really believe
> that. . . to be institutionalized, we had to have our own place that we could
> call home. That this is ours. We don't rent, we own. We are here. It's like a
> homeowner. I don't rent it. I have a place. I can put that flower garden
> where I want. I don't have to have some condo restrictions. I have . . . I
> can do what I want now that I own something. That was a major
> challenge to get over that. One, to convince the trustees that we can build
> this . . . and this is over a number of years . . . then to raise the necessary
> funds, then to acquire any necessary funding and to buy a building itself.

For the NHCS school community, the decision to purchase its own building rather than

simply raising funds to cover facilities costs in a leased space was a profoundly important

organizational decision which resulted in a significant allocation of time from the

headmaster, the deputy headmaster, and the board of trustees. Indeed, when asked the

three top priorities of the Board of Trustees, one trustee responded simply, "Raise money, raise money and raise money!" In discussing their vision for the school in five years, the school's leaders link the building to the school's long-term aspirations. One trustee notes, "The new school that's under construction will house 400 students... It will have two classes in every grade K-1 through 8. It will be a new campus, a completely new campus five years from now... I think that's the most significant difference that we'll be able to afford twice as many kids the opportunity to get a Neighborhood House education." The headmaster explains, "We will also be different from our perspective [in five years] in that we'll be in our own building, and that building will have a gymnasium . . . not only a gymnasium, that will have an Arts and Athletic Center. Our Arts program will be also extremely strong. It will be as strong as our academic, and it is about that now, but we'll get the recognition, the same kind of recognition." The middle school dean says of the new building, "My hope is that it's going to allow us to become more systematized in terms of certain things. One of the things that's both a luxury and a curse about having such a small school and one teacher at each grade level, is that you can kind of get by for longer than you should on, 'Hey, this person's a great teacher and they're motivated and they're going to stay here.'" As UCLA (1998), Kane and Lauricella (2001) and Wells and Scott (2001) note, some charter schools nationally have found that raising money – both for facilities and operating costs – has become a distraction from the school's core mission. However, the NHCS leadership appears to have developed the view that investing in their new "campus" is an investment in expanding and strengthening the school's core programming.

Challenge of Teacher Compensation. Asked where they would direct an unexpected unrestricted gift of $100,000, both the headmaster and middle school dean emphasize their desire to increase teacher compensation. The middle school dean explains, "I feel like if we could have a set salary schedule that matched the Boston Public Schools schedule that would be my first priority, or come very, very close to the Boston Public Schools schedule, that would be my first priority." Both administrators worry that NHCS loses teachers to the district and to the suburbs because of salaries below district schools. The headmaster explains, "People have needs and I can't compete with Boston that's paying $10,000 - $15,000 more once they get to that upper level, the 7th year, 8th year, 10th year." Trustees expressed similar concerns. In answer to the "What would you do with $100,000?" question, one trustee says. "I would have to put all of it to teachers' salaries, to working out some sort of endowment to help fill that gap between what the Boston district schools are paying and what we pay." Teachers are certainly conscious of the salary differential with the district. Describing the kinds of teachers who leave the school because they are not a fit, one teacher comments "And you're definitely going to get the people also who are going to come in and say, 'Gee, it's a lot of work for the money that you get paid. Why should I do this?' We'll get a few people probably that would leave just because it is a lot of work, but it's not the same amount of pay that you would get at BPS [Boston Public Schools}, or in Newton, or whatever." Interestingly, this financial challenge is self-imposed: NHCS has used its autonomy to sets its own teacher pay scale different from the district to offer lower salaries and instead invest those funds in additional staff (to maintain a low student: teacher ratio) and full service programming. The narrative around the lower salaries at

NHCS is particularly noteworthy in that the school appears to have developed an organizational culture in which the trade off of salary against the school's mission and culture is viewed by teachers themselves as a question of commitment or passion rather than fairness.

Staffing

Aligned Staff. As in any school, students at NHCS spend the majority of their day under the care and guidance of teachers. The capacity of NHCS to fulfill its mission is inextricably linked to the efficacy of its faculty. The 2004 Massachusetts Department of Education Renewal Inspection Team offered as a key finding of its review of NHCS that "there is significant evidence that the Neighborhood House Charter School teachers have bought into the mission of the school and are presently promoting it through hard work and dedication" (2004 NHCS Inspection Report, p. 14). The report goes on to say, "Teachers at Neighborhood House Charter School have been successful in creating a culture of achievement among students by exposing them to a rigorous curriculum and holding them to high academic and behavioral standards" (2004 NHCS Inspection Report, p. 14). These inspection findings are consistent with the views of parents who praised teachers' hard work and dedication to their children. Asked to explain what motivates students at NHCS to succeed, a parent explains, "...[T]he teaching style. I think that teachers have so much care for the students that teaching is so much fun for them, that students learn a lot more when it's a fun way of teaching opposed to . . . as a, you know, 'You have to learn just because that's the way it is.'" Another parent says of the NHCS teachers, "They have tight and very thorough teaching, very caring, and have

high standard goals for all of their students, despite of like I said, learning differences."

This blend of caring and high standards is precisely the teaching approach Ogbu and

Simons (1998) describe as necessary to persuade students from involuntary minorities

that school staff are committed to them and that school success is possible.

Both administrators link the school's success to the significant time and energy

invested in the teacher selection process and the resulting quality of the faculty. To

identify teachers with the desired characteristics the school invests significant time in

screening candidates. The middle school dean explains, "First of all you have a series of

interviews, so you're going to meet with [the headmaster], and you're going to meet with

me, and then you're going to meet with a team of teachers, and you're going to write two

essays that all our candidates write and we're going to talk to your references."

Candidates are asked to write about their educational philosophy and what they see as the

unique challenges of urban education. According to the middle school dean, NHCS uses

these essays to screen for both philosophical alignment and writing skills. Describing the

candidates the school ultimately hires, the headmaster characterizes them as "cooperative,

bright, intelligent, committed to kids... and an amazing high level of hard work"

Interestingly, both the headmaster and the middle school dean frequently use words like

"smart" and "intelligent" in describing the teachers the school recruits. The middle

school dean actually posits a link between the academic achievement of the staff and the

achievement of students: "We also have really, really smart teachers who themselves did

a quality of work in middle school or high school or college that is in keeping right in line

with the best districts and the best independent schools have done. I think that helps

shape their expectations for what the kids should do." The decision-making process

around staffing at NHCS certainly reflects that the school leaders would not be surprised by Ferguson's (1998a) finding that teacher test scores are a good predictor of student performance controlling for other factors. Similarly, a Board member sees a relationship between teachers' educational level and their interest in the dynamic roles available at NHCS, saying "I think we have bright teachers. I think they're highly educated themselves and I think because it's a relatively small community where… they can also impact curriculum, they do more than teach so that makes the job very interesting for them. They really can have impact."

Happy to Work Hard. The staff at NHCS prides itself on its worth ethic. One teacher said of her colleagues, "You don't find many schools where you'll come in on a weekend and find teachers here working, which is what you get here. Or you don't have at other schools, teachers that stay until 6:00, 7:00 during the week at night doing things for the next day or the week." The middle school dean says of the candidates NHCS recruits, "We're looking for that intelligence, we're looking for independence, we're looking for drive and motivation, we're looking for people who are going to work a lot of hours for frankly not enough pay." Describing conversations with teachers who have left NHCS for public school districts, the headmaster says "…they do go to other school systems, and they say, 'I don't work as hard. I just don't work as hard as I did at Neighborhood House.' It's just a way of life. We've kind of accepted that." Parents believe teachers' diligence translates into results for their kids. According to the NHCS 2004 Inspection Report, parents reported that they were "impressed by the fact that their children could clearly articulate the things that they have learned or are learning in school. They attribute this change in their children's behavior to the hard work and

dedication of the NHCS staff who they find to be accessible and responsive to their needs" (p. 16). Educational researchers focused on schools that are bridging the achievement gap rarely cite teacher work ethic as a factor in student outcomes, but charter advocates certainly do. Indeed, Nathan (1999) sees charter schools' ability to fire underperforming teachers as essential to preventing hard working, industrious, entrepreneurial new teachers from being worn down by disinterested, mediocre, less committed colleagues.

The staff interviewed for the NHCS 2004 Renewal Inspection Report indicated that they were very satisfied with their experience at the school: "They cited the collegiality among staff, the fact that they have input in the decision making process at the school, and are allowed to be creative in terms of the development and implementation of the curriculum as some of the factors that contribute to the school being a great place to work" (p. 18). The NHCS 2004 Inspection Report characterized the leadership approach at NHCS as "bottom up" and reported that many teachers told the team, "We make decisions about everything that happens at NHCS—schedule, discipline, and room assignment" (p. 17). This "bottom up" approach is reflected in a variety of teacher task forces created to analyze and refine various aspects of the school's approach to curriculum and instruction. For example, the NHCS 2004 Inspection Report describes in some detail the work of the NHCS math task force. The Inspection Team writes, "After attending a math taskforce meeting and reviewing some of the meeting agendas, the team concluded that an important outcome of the work being done by the math taskforce is the development of a common understanding among teachers of what quality math instruction should look like at NHCS" (p. 17). Darling-Hammond (1997) found

that dynamic roles – such as those played by NHCS teachers – are essential to school effectiveness. As an example of the collegial atmosphere at the school, a teacher explained that there are weekly after school meetings on Fridays for the entire middle school staff with an agenda shaped by teachers: "We have a board and anybody who wants to talk about something makes . . . puts that on the board, and then we write that up. Usually [a senior teacher] runs the meetings for us and we just go through everything." The collaboration extends from shared reflection to coordinated implementation of common instruction strategies. For example, the NHCS 2004 Inspection Report explains, "Teachers in both the lower and middle schools use a common blackboard configuration (BBC) to organize the learning experience for students by providing them with a clear routine for successful participation in the classroom" (p. 15). The reflection and collaboration that characterize the professional community of teachers at NHCS are consistent with the findings of Talbert and McLaughlin (1994), Darling-Hammond (1997), Cohen and Hill (2000) about the staff cultures of urban schools with superior results.

Teacher Retention Challenge. NHCS has a stable teaching force, but the school leadership worries about turnover. NHCS teachers are young but not rookies: "100% of teachers at the school have at least three years of teaching experience, with an average of 3.7 years experience at NHCS" (NHCS 2004 Annual Report, p. 2). According to the NHCS 2004 Inspection Report, "A review of the staffing history at NHCS supports the headmaster's claim that the average stay for a teacher is three to four years at NHCS" (p. 18). Perhaps with the significant teacher attrition at charter schools (and urban district schools) in Massachusetts and nationally in mind, the NHCS 2004 Inspection Team said

of NHCS's retention of teachers 3-4 years: "This seems to have ensured the continuity in teaching and learning at the school, especially since some teachers stay with their students for two years." In addition to expressing confidence in their current staff and acknowledging the inevitability of some turnover on a young staff due to family choices and graduate school, the board and both administrators express worries about the school's capacity to retain that staff over the long term both because of the salary differential with public school districts described above and because of the intensity of the experience teaching at NHCS. In response to these concerns the school created a staff Quality of Life Committee (QLC). Teachers described two significant QLC initiatives to the 2004 NHCS Renewal Inspection Team. First, teachers reported that the QLC was instrumental in persuading the administration to hire additional specialist teachers (drama, etc.) to reduce the content area teachers' class loads. Second, teachers reported that the QLC rejected the idea of adopting a merit pay system at NHCS because they feared "it took away from the spirit of collaboration" (p. 18). The middle school dean also attributed to the Quality of Life Committee an initiative early in the school's life to set-up an on-site daycare for the young children of staff. Although the daycare was discontinued, the headmaster and middle school dean cited it as an illustration of the school's responsiveness to teacher needs, reflecting its commitment to retaining high quality staff. The willingness of the school leaders to invest in meeting teachers' needs beyond academic support reflects the deep concern for the welfare of others that Sebring and Bryk (2000) cited as a key quality of principals in urban schools with superior results.

Headmaster as Institution-Builder. The administrative team of the K-8 campus is comprised of the Headmaster, a Deputy Headmaster for Resource Development and

Community Affairs, a lower school dean, a middle school dean, and a dean of student

support services. Consistent with the school's focus on individual student needs, the role

of the dean of student support services is described in the NHCS 2004 Inspection Report

as "created to integrate all the support services for struggling students within the school's

academic program" (p. 6). However, on a day-to-day basis the headmaster and the

middle school dean have the greatest impact on the culture, academic program, and

general operation of the NHCS middle school. Central to the Headmaster's role is

institution building – in the vein of the entrepreneurial leadership UCLA (1998) describes

as associated with charter success. Currently, the headmaster and the middle school dean

emphasize the centrality of development – particularly for the school's facility – to that

institution-building role. However, institution-building encompasses a broad array of

activities, including persuading a founding class of parents to enroll in a school without a

track record and communicating to each new generation of teachers the school'

educational philosophy. One parent recalled the role the Headmaster played in her

decision to enroll her child in the school's first year,

> I went to the library, [the headmaster] was there. He also . . . [shared] his
> mission, his goals, he was like a young boy with a with a brand new car,
> and he just knew that in 10 years we were going to be shining at the top of
> the hill and that drove me to his . . . he just knew that he could get a bunch
> of neighborhood children, community children and in spite of what wasn't
> successful at Boston Public Schools, he could make a success along the
> way. I wanted to be part of the . . . a parent of that school to just be
> involved from day one.

Another parent says of the headmaster that:

> [O]ne thing about [the Headmaster], you can always see that he cares
> about what goes on. I don't care how small it is. He cares about what goes
> on in this school, and you can see it in his actions, you hear it in his words,
> and I think that's what makes the school the way it is. If the Head is the
> one who has that . . . those types of ideas, then he's going to bring in
> people with those similar ideas and since it started, he's been bringing in

people that have helped it develop to the point where it's glowing right now.

Teachers also talk about the headmaster's role as a driver of the school culture. For example, one teacher says of the headmaster:

> I describe [the headmaster] like the principal in "Lean on Me" who has that tough façade, but loves the kids and would do anything for the kids or the staff. I think that he is definitely there, I personally have had some rough times here, and he's definitely helped me out in terms of being supportive and taking on a father role as he says. It's nice to have that. It's not just somebody breathing down your neck and saying, 'This is what you have to do.' I think that he's definitely there for the right reasons. I don't the school would be something without him.

Another teacher adds "He wants the best for the school and the kids. He does care about the staff. He's always looking for new opportunities to make the school better and to make the staff better, but he does appreciate the sense of community." A board member says of the headmaster's leadership "It's not enough to say, 'Look what I've got for kids, ya know? No wonder I can't do very well.' Huh-uh, that never works. [The headmaster has] got high expectations for the teachers. It's up to the teachers to teach those kids no matter what they get, what kids they get. And so he's got those expectations but then he gives them huge support." Another board member adds, "I would also say he's on some level a spiritual person, so this is more than a job this is really a mission for him. As he says, we do God's work here. I think that leads to a level of motivation, passion, caring, intelligence and everything else . . . leadership." These quotations suggest that the NHCS headmaster embodies the moral purpose, capacity for coherence making, and vision setting ability Fullan (2002) and Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004) cite as critical for successful school leadership. Although the headmaster has over time, by his description, moved further from the day-to-day activities of the school by

delegating authority to his deans, his role as leader of the community has a powerful impact on the school's key constituencies.

Middle School Dean As Instructional Leader. The middle school dean sees supporting teachers instructionally as her top priority. Describing regular meetings with each teacher, she says, "That can be anything from, let's look at the standards and start to think about these are the ones that you have these assessments to show that the kids are at this point in the year at mastery level, and those were still struggling with this, to literally, 'here's the quiz that I just did with my 7th graders and let's look this over. What do you think the responses indicate?' Or 'How can I write better questions next time to get more at what the kids are learning?'" In addition to supporting teaches directly the middle school dean dedicates significant time to coordinating the work of consultants the school has contracted with over a two-year period to support teachers in math, science, and writing. She describes her role with the consultants as "sort of helping both guide them in what my expectations are and what my hope is to get out of the work. Also getting feedback from them about what an outsider's perspective [is] about what they see as our challenges and strengths." In describing their relationship with the school's administration, teachers emphasize the instructional support they receive. For example, one teacher said of the headmaster and the middle school dean:

> They identify your weaknesses and your strengths and help you to
> improve. Give you some type of plan, certain things you should focus on
> for the year. That was helpful for me when I first came here, because [as]
> the first year teacher you just don't know if you're doing something right
> and you feel like everything you do is wrong. It's nice to hear what you
> did well and what you should continue to do. But at the same time, this
> next year you should focus on this, and the following year you should
> focus on this. That's been very motivating.

Another teacher said of the middle school dean, "when I started here, I met with her biweekly and sometimes weekly to discuss curriculum or anything I needed help with, which was again, lends to, speaks to how supportive she is, which is really nice." In many ways, the middle school dean plays the instructional leadership role Elmore (1999) descries in that she seeks to have a deep understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of instruction at the school and focuses her energies on developing improved instructional practice both through sharing her own expertise and facilitating effective collaboration between teachers and coaches/consultants. Teachers describe feeling well-supported despite the absence of a consistent system of formal evaluations. According to the 2004 NHCS Inspection Report:

> At the time of the renewal visit, not every teacher had received a formal evaluation by the deans. Those who had gone through the process said that it involved the deans of school conducting classroom observations, meeting with teachers to discuss the things they had seen in the classroom, and providing them with feedback as to how they could improve their craft. The teachers also mentioned that they were required to set three professional goals for the year and meet regularly with the deans to review their progress towards achieving them. Teachers who were not formally evaluated mentioned, however, that the headmaster and deans of schools have conducted numerous informal visits to their classrooms since the start of the school year.

Commenting on the absence of a formal evaluation system, one teacher notes "It's definitely a weakness that we have. I know it's something they're actually working on improving for next year." Although the lack of a formal evaluation system risks the confusion about expectations that SRI (1997) and UCLA (1998) describe as a common problem in charter schools, NHCS seems to be compensating for this weakness through hands-on instructional management and mentoring by the middle school dean.

Only the Right Fit. The absence of a formal evaluation system does not mean the administrative team is not constantly evaluating the staff and assessing whether staff

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members – all on one year contracts – are the right fit. In fact, both the headmaster and

middle school dean describe the school's willingness to counsel out ineffective staff. The

headmaster explains:

> I've never really had to fire anybody. I counsel them out of a job. People
> have come to me and said . . . I try to put people in the situation where
> they can come and resign. It's just not working, and some of that is, some
> tricks I learned in the trade from a union guy, working with personnel
> folks. Sometimes you have to do that with a teacher that is weak, you've
> got to move them on.

The middle school dean says of the people counseled out "they're not motivated, they're

not trying hard, they're not making progress." This is precisely the kind of use of charter

autonomy with respect to staffing that Wilson (1992), Nathan (1999), and Finn et al.

(2000) would embrace. The middle school dean sees a clear connection between the

school's hire/fire autonomy and the school's success, saying of the Boston Public

Schools:

> I really think that the effect of unions can be stifling and the degree to
> which administrators have control over hiring and firing their staff is just
> absolutely key. I think that the unions have brought a lot of good things,
> definitely in terms of salary and benefits and all those kinds of things, but
> I think it goes too far into protecting teachers that shouldn't be protected
> and creating a mindset of, 'It's 3:30 and I'm out of here.'

A teacher echoes the middle school dean's criteria for teachers who would not be a fit for

NHCS, saying "I think that if someone doesn't fit, they realize that it's not a good fit for

them, and they'll leave. They'll make that decision, just because I can see someone who's

not as motivated or who's not as dedicated to the kids at the school. I could see them

standing out." Culture can be defined as much by who is included as by who is excluded

and NHCS is clearly using its autonomy with respect to staffing to send a clear cultural

message: teachers here work hard and are dedicated to doing whatever is required to help

kids succeed.

Curriculum & Instruction

High Expectations. Central to the NHCS approach to curriculum and instruction

is delivering a message of high expectations. Asked to explain why NHCS out-performs

Boston Public Schools, the middle school dean explains:

> If I had to say, I would say we have a higher set of expectations and
> structures in place so that we're able to hold kids accountable to a higher
> level of academic work--for our high kids. And then I think we probably
> have better than average supports for our struggling kids in terms of our
> special ed. staffing and in terms of specialists and in terms of class size
> and in terms of a common shared sense that even if this kid is at the line
> level they can and should make improvements, and the expectations
> should be that they can become proficient.

A teacher offers a similar characterization of NHCS and argues that makes the school

more like a private school than like a district school:

> I would describe it as a school where the teachers are extremely
> motivated and have very high expectations for the kids... The only place
> where I've seen it be really consistent like this is in a private school, really.
> So I sort of always equate Neighborhood House with an opportunity for
> city kids to go to a private school because it's very much like that. Small
> class sizes, the expectations, the personal involvement . . .

A trustee echoes these sentiments, saying "There is an expectation created for every

student who walks through the door that you are going to be a good student here and

you're going to love learning. That expectation is communicated to both the student and

their parents." Asked what motivates students at NHCS to succeed, a parent cites the

ethos of high expectations described by the staff, "I'm of the mind that if you place

expectations on your children, you let them know that you think highly of them and you

let them know that there's greatness in them, that there's nothing you can't do. So if you

set the bar high, they'll try to reach for it. You set the bar low, that's how high they're

going to go too." Ferguson (1998b) identifies this high expectations message as critical

to teacher efficacy and it is undoubtedly essential to the school staff's effort to send the

messages of faith in the students and rejection of negative stereotypes about them that

Ogbu & Simons (1998) identify as important to overcoming involuntary minorities'

disidentification with school.

Normalizing the MCAS. One of the ways the staff conveys high expectations is

to, as one parent explains, "normalize" the MCAS. Of the school's approach to

demystifying the MCAS for students, that parent says "it's almost like the way people tell

you to talk about sex with your kids. If you start introducing very early as a normal kind

of conversation, so you're not having 'The Talk' with them. You just introduce it as a part

of life." Another parent adds:

> My son emphasizes on the fact that the teachers have explained that the
> MCAS is coming up and to prepare him for it and what he has been doing
> for the MCAS. I don't think he's concentrated on how the media makes it
> seems, you know if you don't pass this, if I tend to get this certain grade,
> you're going to stay back. He's concentrated more on what his teachers are
> saying to him and how his teachers are preparing him to be successful to
> pass the MCAS.

The middle school dean explains that alignment with the state frameworks and MCAS

are non-negotiable: "one of the things that helps is we buy into the fact that MCAS is a

good measure and that state frameworks are a valuable tool, so you don't get a whole lot

of fighting about whether or not this is something good. I think that can be a real time

waster for people." Teachers also describe curriculum and instruction at NHCS as

aligned with the Massachusetts standards and the MCAS. One teacher explains, "I think

that all year long, the assignments that are given and the lessons that are taught are geared

towards the MCAS. It's not teaching to the MCAS, but teaching about it... Teach them

what they should be looking for, not just on the MCAS, but on any kind of test or

assignment..." Another teacher adds, "I teach backwards from the standards, so if they

have to understand the different characteristics of the planets in Astronomy and how that

relates to Earth, you can do a lot of fun activities with that and incorporate different learning styles while you're doing it. In the end, they've learned a lot about the planets, they've had a fun time with it, and they understand it to where they can take that with them to high school..." Researchers focused on bridging the achievement gap have not written extensively on the importance of curriculum alignment with state exams, perhaps because of a fear of being branded as endorsing a narrowing of the curriculum or the replacement of academic rigor with test prep activities, but the staff and families at NHCS seem to proceed on the assumption that what students must know and be able to do to excel on state exams is important to their ability to succeed in college and the professional world and their ability to function effectively as citizens and therefore alignment is not a strategy for improving test scores but rather a strategy for giving students access to opportunity.

Differentiation & Individualized Attention. NHCS seeks to complement its high expectations message with a message that the adults believe the students can reach those expectations and are there to help them through individualized attention. According to the NHCS 2004 Inspection Report, "Although NHCS teachers have high expectations for every student, they do recognize that each student learns differently. They, therefore, use a variety of instructional strategies to deliver instruction. In the classes visited by the team there was evidence of students being engaged in collaborative learning activities, rotating among centers, working one on one with a teacher or independently, and participating in hands on activities" (p. 14). The Inspection Team's observations were supported by the feedback they received from students: "When asked to describe the level of difficulty of their assignments, the six middle school students who participated in

[the focus group] said that while the work was hard they get enough support from teachers which makes it easy for them to complete and understand what is expected of them" (NHCS 2004 Inspection Report, p. 15). Parents appreciate the school's emphasis on differentiation. One parent notes, "The teachers are extremely sensitive and caring towards each individual student's need, and they're aware that not all student's learning capacity or at the same level. And they work very hard with family and students to be able to have the student feel that they're receiving what [he or she] needs to be to be a successful student." Individualized support is also evident in the NHCS middle school advisory system. According the 2004 NHCS Inspection Report, "[M]iddle school students are assigned academic advisors who are responsible for monitoring their progress, communicating with their families, and advocating for the children in the school. The academic advisors meet regularly with students to get an update about their progress which they in turn communicate to classroom teachers and parents." The intense focus on individual needs at NHCS is consistent with Elmore's (1995) argument that effective instruction accounts for the fact that "learners differ substantially in the experience, the cognitive predispositions, and the competencies they bring to specific bodies of knowledge" (pp. 358-364).

Consistent with its focus on blending high expectations and extensive individual support, NHCS has in place a student support team comprised of the dean of students, two nurses, the school social worker, and the parent center coordinator. This student support team works with the teachers of referred students to create support plans for the students. These plans may include in-class strategies for teachers to employ, push-in services, pull-out services provided on site, or referrals to services available off-site (such

as family counseling through the non-profit Family Services of Greater Boston). For

students in need of special education services, NHCS follows a full-inclusion model that

relies on push-in support staff who work with individual students rather than a team

teaching model. The 2004 NHCS Inspection Report notes, "For example, there were

three adults—the learning specialist, classroom teacher, and writing specialist—in a

middle class school English class that had twenty one students. The writing and learning

specialists moved around the classroom offering support to students while the classroom

teacher conducted the lesson" (p. 15). The school leadership at NHCS takes great pride

in the scope of supports available to its students most at-risk of failure. The headmaster

explains, "It's a family oriented [culture] in that we get involved in the family because

we're a full service school. I think that's one of the reasons why we have such a high

number of special education kids, is we take "your weak, your hungry, your poor" kind of

thing, and our MO is that we will take these more struggling kids . .." A trustee

emphasizes that the limited bureaucracy at the school ensures whatever resources are

needed will be directed to support the academic success of all students:

> The kids are number one as I said before, and the school will do what is
> necessary to give the teachers the assets so that the kids can learn. That's
> clearly not the situation in public schools. The corporate hierarchy at this
> school stops at the Headmaster. There's no school committee, there's no
> Court Street [where the Boston Public Schools central office is located], if
> you've got a problem, it will be resolved one way or another in this school.
> If the toilet doesn't work, it will be fixed. There are no unions here. If the
> computer's not working, we've got somebody who can fix it and the
> equipment will operate because everybody knows we've got a job to do
> and that's teach the kids, not just take up space and have jobs.
> Teacher Autonomy. The staff at NHCS describes teacher autonomy in

developing curricula and shaping instruction as a central tenet of the school's educational

philosophy. A trustee notes, "[T]eachers here have a lot of input in the curriculum. I

know that some of the bigger public schools are structured in a way that the teachers are just given what to teach. They're very involved in working with [the headmaster] to come up with a curriculum that works with both the teacher and the student." The middle school dean explains:

> [T]he trust we give to teachers is more in line with an independent
> school model. We give our teachers a lot of autonomy to make decisions.
> They really have a lot of discretion to plan their lessons, to design their
> assessments, to suggest initiatives that might be good for the school, to be
> involved in leadership opportunities within the school that you might not
> see at a more traditional school.

Asked to compare NHCS and the Boston Public Schools, a teacher says of teaching in a district school, "You have less autonomy in your classroom with your curriculum [than at NHCS]." Another adds, "[T]here's a lot more freedom here to do our own thing in the classroom and teach in a style that we want." Interestingly, the middle school's small size provides a vehicle for advancing instructional coherence despite teacher autonomy in curriculum development. The middle school dean explains, "One of the things that helps at our middle school level is you have the same person Social Studies in 6th grade, 7th grade and 8th grade, so they have a real good sense . . . you don't have to have that communication level of what, 'Is what the 7th grade teacher doing lines up to what the 8th grade teacher is doing?'" Despite the vertical alignment within the middle school content areas, the headmaster responds to a question about coordination of curriculum and instruction across the school by saying, "I think we're doing B work with that question, and we need to get to A minus work." In a school where alignment with state standards and state exams are clearly prioritized, it is perhaps somewhat surprising to hear school staff emphasizing the high degree of teacher autonomy. However, it may be argued that the school leaders at NHCS approach teacher curriculum development in

much the same way as the state approaches charter school curricular autonomy: a tight-ends, loose-means approach that asks teachers to ensure students achieve proficiency in the state standards and excel on state exams without proscribing their design of lessons or selection of materials.

Data-Driven Decisions. Although neither administrators nor teachers described a systematic school-wide approach to internal assessments, the Board and staff emphasize that decision-making at the school is driven by assessment data. According to the 2004 NHCS Inspection Report, assessment data in math – generated through both internal and external assessments – led to a re-thinking of the school's approach to math (p. 19). A trustee explains:

> ...[W]e have goals for MCAS achievement and then the Headmaster
> makes a detailed presentation on how we did versus the goals, and what
> he's going to do to improve it next year. And the budget is in part based
> upon the academic needs of the school. A perfect example is Math. We
> were not happy with our Math performance, we've hired more teachers,
> and in the middle school we teach Math eight times a week.

The middle school dean links the school's rapid response to math assessment data and the school's autonomy as a charter school, commenting "That's something that we can kind of turn on a dime and implement over the course of a two to three month period because we have the freedom and flexibility to do that." She adds, describing the school's commitment to being data-driven, "[A]ll teachers who are teaching in MCAS tested grades are using sample questions from released tests, are discussing the work that they're doing with their kids either with other teachers or with administrators, or both, [and] are analyzing patterns of achievement on assessments." Even as both administrators describe ways the school uses data currently and the school's ambitious goals for continuing to increase students' achievement on key external assessments (including the MCAS), they

both acknowledge a need to strengthen the school's systems around data management and analysis. For example, the middle school dean notes, "We don't have a really effective database system for managing [data]… So we waste a lot of time on sort of pencil and paper manipulations of that kind of stuff. So I'm hoping we'll be much more efficient with that." The 2004 NHCS Inspection Report focused on use of assessment data as a critical area for improvement for NHCS, concluding, "a process for systematically collecting and analyzing data for evaluating program effectiveness and student achievement is lacking," but adding, "The school leadership, however, recognizes that it needs to improve the way in which it collects and analyzes data to track student progress" (p. 18-19). Although NHCS does not have the robust structures to support data-driven instruction that Shepard (2000) advocates, NHCS does have the ability as a charter school to rapidly align its resources to needs identified through assessment and that may in itself be a significant advantage over traditional district schools.

Challenge of Cultural Responsiveness. Despite the school's strong commitment to responding to individual student needs, the school's leaders acknowledge they are struggling with the issue of cultural responsiveness – particularly in terms of providing role models of color for students. The middle school dean describes a series of conversations she has had with the headmaster about making curriculum and instruction at the school culturally responsive:

> [H]e doesn't want to have a school, nor do I, that's like, 'This is African American History month and so we're all going to talk about this for this month.' We want to have a school where that is balanced throughout the curriculum in a natural way. So that when you are studying American History and you're looking at the War for Independence, you're talking about Black soldiers who were in that war and when they were allowed to fight and why and sort of all the way through… There's a lot of great literature that our kids read from a wide range of authors. They often write

about things both balancing and expanding on their own experiences and
connecting those to things that they read.

When asked to describe how NHCS is culturally responsive, teachers describe individual

units they deem culturally relevant: Islam, Latin America, diverse artists, and diverse

musical traditions. However, one teacher raises the issue of racial differences between

the staff and students. She explains:

> I think the teachers in the school, we are predominantly White, but I
> think that everybody here is dedicated to understanding the needs of our
> children. And so we've been required to read books, I know actually we
> had a book club once--which wasn't a requirement--read a book on racism
> and had discussions about that. There was that workshop that I told you
> about already about teaching African American children.

The headmaster – who is African-American – worries that teachers may be too

responsive to issues of race:

> [A]re the teachers here sensitive to the needs of all the children? Yeah.
> Very much so. Sometimes too much so. That's where I step in. I know
> little Johnny's mom is this and that, no matter what the culture is, but hey,
> he's still got to get his homework done in the morning. I'm sorry if there's
> lots of chaos going on in the house. Maybe we need to help that and
> maybe he needs to be at school with us more, so at least when he comes to
> this environment, he'll have his stuff done.

In the headmaster's view, the core responsibility of the school is academic instruction,

not cultural responsiveness: "If our kids can't read and write and do Math . . . and I say

our kids, African American, Latino kids in particularly . . . if they can't, we can give them

all the culture in the world, but if they can't write about it or speak articulately and they

can't articulate it in a fashion that others can understand, what use is it to be culturally

responsive?" However, he does worry about the school's lack of more role models of

color. He explains, "I try to attract African American teachers, Asian teachers and Latino

teachers here to the school, so I do a lot of work on that. I make sure that I have quite a

diverse staff. The middle school staff needs work. It's not as diverse as it should be."

The middle school dean echoes this sentiment:

I think as a school overall, we have a pretty good balance and a lot of
people from a lot of different backgrounds, but our middle school is
exceedingly White and I think that's a real problem for us. I don't think . . .
when I say it's a real problem for us, I don't think it has manifested itself
into specific issues that I can see coming up. I think it's a problem for us in
that I don't [think] it meshes with the type of school that we want to be.

Parents also seem concerned about the lack of teachers of color. One parent describes a

miscommunication between a teacher and her child which she attributes to a gap in

cultural understanding. Another parent worries that teachers might tolerate behaviors

they should not because of assumptions about race and class. She explains:

I can remember a time at the middle school where you know, young
White teachers . . . kids being a little bit too familiar with the teacher, and
that being acceptable because the assumption was that like, that's
acceptable from their home, or that's acceptable in the neighborhood. I
challenged the teacher, I said, 'I'm willing to bet you, if you told her
mother that she was talking to you like that and acting that way with you,
she'd hang her out to dry...Don't assume that her parents accept that from
her.' And so this may seem like a generalization, but my thought was,
young or not, a young Black teacher would have been like, 'Now you
know what. I know your mother taught you better. Knock it off.' They
would have challenged it, I think.

Another parent says she was worried about staff diversity in the past, "but I found out

that some of the teachers live right around the neighborhood, so that kind of made me

feel a little better because they're going through the same city stuff that my child does.

Even though the culture is different, it's pretty much the same city street talk and all that

kind of stuff, and they were able to understand what was going on..." For administrators

staff diversity is a route to developing positive role models and for parents staff diversity

appears to be a rout to ensuring teacher understanding, but both constituencies agree on

the need for more teachers of color at NHCS. The lack of African-American role models

on the staff and the limited inclusion of African-American culture and history in the

curriculum suggest that to successfully address the disidentification with school that

worries Ogbu and Simons (1998), Steele (1992), and Steele and Aronson (1998), the