

Four Rivers Charter Public School Greenfield, MA

June 9, 2006

Four Rivers Charter Public School (Four Rivers) opened in 2003 as a Commonwealth charter school serving 64 students in grades 7 and 8. The school currently has 136 students in grades 7 through 10, and plans to expand one grade each year, building to 192 students in grades 7 through 12. The school draws students from Franklin County. Four Rivers' mission states that "Four Rivers Charter School is dedicated to educating young people for lives of learning and service. The school offers a rigorous academic program aligned with the Massachusetts curriculum frameworks and an emphasis on character development for moral and social responsibility. Three central themes – nature, technology and community – pervade teaching and learning at the school, engaging students and teachers in a fundamental question of our times: how do we find the healthy, fruitful, interrelationship of the natural world, technology in its many forms, and the human community? The school works closely with parents and seeks both to serve and to learn from the many resources of Franklin County." The school was founded as an Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound school, and draws much of its school design and operation from this national comprehensive school reform model.

In documents provided to the site visit team, Four Rivers reported the following demographic makeup of its students: 60 percent of students are male, and 40 percent are female. 94 percent of students are White, 1 percent are Hispanic, 1 percent are Pacific Islander, 2 percent are Black, and 1 percent are Asian American. No students are Limited English Proficient, and 21 percent of students receive special education services. 20 percent of the student population qualify to receive free- or reduced-priced meals.

The following participants conducted the site visit on May 9, 2006:

- Sally Bachofer, Coordinator of Accountability, MA DOE Charter School Office
- Barry Barnett, Coordinator of Federal Programs, MA DOE Charter School Office
- Lan Katz, Executive Director, Martin Luther King, Jr. Charter School of Excellence, Springfield, MA
- Dan Klatz, Education Coordinator, Hilltown Cooperative Charter School, Haydenville, MA
- Charlie Toomajian, Associate Dean for Academic Programs and Registrar, Williams College

Before the visit, the site team reviewed the 2004-2005 Annual Report for the charter school, the Year 2 Site Visit Report, and recent assessment data. On site, the team reviewed curricular documents, student work portfolios, board materials, and other information provided by the school. The team conducted group and individual interviews with trustees, administrators, teachers, families, and students; and observed classes.

The purpose of this visit was to corroborate and augment the information contained in the school's Annual Report, to investigate the school's progress relative to its Accountability Plan goals, and to collect information that will help the Commissioner and Board of Education make a renewal recommendation for the school's charter. The focus of the visit is on three central areas of inquiry:

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

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

1. Academic Program Success

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

Finding: Curriculum development at Four Rivers is guided by the school's mission, its affiliation with Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound, and the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. Staff, school leadership and the Board of Trustees all spoke about the three mission themes of nature, technology and community, Expeditionary Learning (EL) and the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks (MCF) as guiding influences for the curriculum. EL is a national school reform model that connects academic learning to adventure, service and character development. The model has designed a method for creating and delivering curriculum called Learning Expeditions that are essentially cross-disciplinary, linked units and lessons that incorporate service learning and fieldwork. A key component of learning expeditions and EL's teaching philosophy is that students create products that synthesize their understanding and learning and that those projects are shared with authentic audiences. School staff described utilizing Expeditionary Learning as a pedagogical framework as well as the specific curriculum structures of learning expeditions and investigations.

Finding: Formal curriculum development is further along than last year, but is still an ongoing, teacher intensive experience.

As with last year, the school is working to formalize its curriculum. Teachers at the school all described curriculum creation and development as ongoing. Teachers had formal time during summer planning to create and revise curriculum, and have worked together formally and informally as teams and divisions as well as with their EL school designer. School designers are essentially school coaches who work with teachers as they plan learning expeditions and serve as a resource to model Expeditionary Learning teaching methodology. Four Rivers teachers have developed a few core learning expeditions, are using learning expeditions from other EL schools (for example, the Fading Footprints expedition) and investigations. Teachers and school leadership share the intent for the school to codify its curriculum by mapping the core academic subjects through the grades and by formal documentation of learning expeditions as foundational elements of the school's curriculum. Plans are in place for this to happen formally by the end of the 2006-2007 school year. Expansion of the academic program to Grade 10, teaching staff new to the EL model design, and the teacher-driven nature of the creation of Learning Expeditions and investigations are all factors that have impacted the school's ability to formally document and map a comprehensive curriculum for the full grade span of the school.

Finding: Four Rivers continues to provide numerous internal and external resources to support teachers as they plan, build, improve, and deliver the school's curriculum.

This school year, teachers were grouped into divisions, with division I covering grades 7 and 8, and division II covering grades 9 and 10. Teachers reported to the site visit team that they take advantage of formal and informal professional development and curriculum planning time by grade level, subject area, and division. They also appreciate working with their school designer,

and feel that he is accessible both for curriculum development and planning as well as modeling, coaching and classroom support. The special education staff attend grade level and division meetings to address support planning for students. Division meetings are planned and facilitated by the division team leader. It is up to teachers to plan how to use informal time to plan and collaborate during the week. Through its affiliation with Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound, the school receives school designer time each year. Teachers and staff have access to the national Expeditionary Learning network, including the opportunity to participate at the network's annual National Conference, attend site seminars at other network schools, and share nationally distributed learning expeditions, projects and product ideas. Staff reported that they are encouraged to identify professional development opportunities and that the school has been very supportive in ensuring that they can participate in these activities.

Finding: School leadership has not yet implemented the formalized teacher supervision protocol that was in development at the end of last school year.

At the end of last school year, school leadership drafted a framework for formalized evaluation and to guide expectations for teaching at Four Rivers. This framework included formal goal setting at the beginning of the school year, two to three formal classroom observations with debrief meetings afterwards, and an end-of-year reflection meeting. It was the intention that this evaluation system would be used this school year. Returning teachers reported to the team that they completed the first step of the process by setting personal goals in collaboration with the school's director. However, the school director has not formally observed teachers this year, or scheduled end-of-year reflection meetings. School leadership has informally visited classrooms and teachers reported to the team that the director and assistant director were readily available with support when asked. When asked who provided instructional leadership at the school, teachers replied that they primarily received it from their peers, more veteran teachers, and their EL school designer, not from school leadership. The school director reported that he is aware that he was not able to provide teachers with the formalized supervision that he had planned for this year. Both the Board of Trustees and school administrative team acknowledged that with a growing academic program and teaching staff, the director did not and does not have the time to devote to instructional leadership as originally planned. The board spoke of exploring the possibility of hiring more administrative leadership as the school grows to cover the critical elements of curriculum and instruction supervision and leadership.

Finding: In all observed classrooms, teachers created an environment that facilitated teaching and learning that was engaging, and pushed higher-order thinking and questioning skills.

Members of the site visit team visited classes taking place during the morning of the visit. In all classrooms observed by the site visit team, teachers maintained an environment that was focused on learning. Site team members observed common structures for classroom organization and management – the use of student planners, and posting of learning objectives, an agenda, classwork and homework on the boards. Teachers utilized a variety of teaching and learning methodologies, including small group work, whole class discussion, modeling thinking and questioning skills, and frequent checks for students understanding. All students were engaged in academic work, and student behavior was managed effectively. The school's six virtues and Expeditionary Learning's 12 guiding principles are posted in classrooms and common space, and students are aware of their meaning. During classroom visits, members of the site visit team saw evidence of students engaged in higher order thinking and questioning skills, students activating previous experiences and knowledge, and students who were enthusiastic about their learning

activities. Students reported to the team that teachers have high expectations and standards for their behaviour and academic work.

Finding: Four Rivers provides a broad array of supports for students.

The school provides both regular education and special education students a broad array of supports, including the learning lab, homework support and student success plans.

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

Internal assessments

Finding: Four Rivers continues to work on its internal assessment system, and has defined and refined components of this system so that teachers can use it to evaluate student progress toward student learning objectives.

As with last year, teachers reported and the team observed that the internal assessment system at Four Rivers is based on a number of formal and informal tools and processes. The school uses progress reports, testing and portfolios to track student understanding and mastery of content and skills, and to report this information to students and families. Progress reports integrate the school's character standards and all students receive written feedback from teachers as well as an overall assessment as to the quality of their work (on a mastery scale of beginning to exceeding). Teachers use informal check-ins for understanding throughout their lessons. Students lead teacher-family conferences in the middle of the first and second trimesters, at which time progress is reviewed and goals for growth are agreed upon. Families reported that they appreciate and like the fact that they are kept informed of their student's performance and the fact that students are required to facilitate the student-led conferences.

Student produced and teacher produced rubrics guide the production and assessment of student work. This year, staff developed passage portfolio requirements for grades 8 and 10. These requirements reflect the schools mission, educational philosophy, and school climate and culture norms and expectations. Staff are working to define portfolio standards for all grades, including passage standards at grades 8 and 10, and exit standards at Grade 12, and have been particularly focused on the growing high school program. The school provided passing rates for students at each grade level which showed that as of this spring, on average, students are passing more than 80 percent of their courses. Division I students are assessed in four areas and are not passing 35 of the possible 272 offerings. The 68 students in division II are not passing 48 of the possible 340 offerings (division II students are assessed in five areas).

External assessments

Finding: Four Rivers has MCAS test results from the 2004 and 2005 test administrations. In general, students have higher proficiency rates in English Language Arts than in math.

Table I below summarizes the MCAS performance of Four Rivers students.

Table I: Four Rivers MCAS Results by Performance Category

	Students Included	% Advanced	% Proficient	% Needs Improvement	% Warning/Failed	CPI
ELA - Grade 7						
2004	32	3	69	25	3	87.5
2005	33	9	79	12	0	95.5
Math - Grade 8						
2004	32	9	28	56	6	70.3
2005	34	0	26	59	15	66.2

Grade 7 ELA: On the 2004 administration of this exam, 72 percent of students demonstrated proficiency (by scoring in the Proficient or Advanced performance categories), and 97 percent scored in the top three performance categories. On the 2005 exam, all students passed and the proficiency rate increased to 88 percent.

Grade 8 math: On the 2004 administration of this exam, 94 percent of students scored in the top three performance categories. Thirty-seven percent of the students demonstrated proficiency (by scoring in the Proficient or Advanced performance categories), and 56 percent scored in the Needs Improvement category. Scores declined on the 2005 administration, with fifteen percent of the students scoring in the Warning/Failing performance category and 26 students reaching proficiency.

It is important to note that special education students sat for 35 MCAS exams in 2005, and passed 30 of these exams.

Table II below presents the school’s history of Adequate Yearly Progress* (AYP) determinations. The school does not yet have statistically significant subgroups for accountability purposes.

Table II: History of AYP Determinations for Four Rivers

Adequate Yearly Progress History									Accountability Status
		1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	
ELA	Aggregate	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Yes	Yes	No Status
	All subgroups	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	
MATH	Aggregate	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Yes	No	No Status
	All subgroups	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	

Terra Nova:

Finding: Four Rivers administers the Terra Nova Basic Multiple Assessments in Reading, Language, and Mathematics to grade 7, 8 and 9 students, but definitive statements about the progress or rate of student improvement cannot be made with the data that was made available to the site visit team.

Four Rivers currently administers the Terra Nova Basic Multiple Assessments in Reading, Language, and Mathematics to grade 7, 8 and 9 students. The school plans to continue to

* Adequate Yearly Progress is defined by the state based on the standards of the federal No Child Left Behind Act. A school that makes AYP is considered “on track” to have all students score at the Proficient level or higher by the year 2014.

administer this test in the fall of students' Grade 7 year, and in the spring of students' grade 7, 8, and 9 year, both as a diagnostic tool for incoming students and to track student growth longitudinally. Due to a few complicating reasons, definitive statements about the progress or rate of student improvement cannot be made with the data that was made available to the site visit team. The school has changed test versions, and has not administered the tests at the exact recurring dates from year to year. In addition, the Reading and Language results do not match up with student performance on the MCAS ELA exam, or with results of the school's internal assessments. Through conversation with school administration, it is clear to the site visit team that the school is committed to the use of data to drive instructional practice, to identify and address improvement areas in the school's curriculum, and to identify areas of student need. The school will continue to administer the Terra Nova and track results to identify trends in student achievement and the renewal inspection team should look closely at the data in the fall of the school's fifth year.

Reporting on progress towards meeting Accountability Plan goals:

Four Rivers received approval for its Accountability Plan in September 2004. Last year's site visit report covered each goal and indicator in great detail. In general, the school is making progress towards meeting goals and indicators for student academic achievement (below). However, at this time, no overall conclusions can be drawn about if the school has met all goals, as the school is in its third year with its first Grade 10 class, it does not yet enroll students at all grades in its proposed grade 7 through 12 configuration and is in the process of improving internal assessment measures. In addition, the school is in the process of establishing baseline data from a number of sources in order to determine appropriate pacing of expectations for student academic improvement.

- **Accountability Plan Goal 1: English Language Arts - Writing:**
Students at Four Rivers Charter School will be able to communicate clearly in writing for different purposes and audiences.
- **Accountability Plan Goal 2: English Language Arts - Reading:**
Students at Four Rivers Charter School will be able to effectively comprehend, analyze, and interpret literature and non-fiction texts.
- **Accountability Plan Goal 3: Math:**
Students at Four Rivers Charter School will be able to apply mathematical knowledge and skills to solve problems.
- **Accountability Plan Goal 4: Science:**
Students at Four Rivers Charter School will be able to apply scientific knowledge and methods to solve problems and conduct experiments and research.
- **Accountability Plan Goal 5: Social Studies/History:**
Students at Four Rivers Charter School will be able to apply historical insights and research skills to better understand United States and world history.

2. Organizational Viability

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

Finding: The Four Rivers community shares a common understanding of and commitment to the school's mission.

All stakeholders expressed a common understanding of the school's mission, and the themes of nature, technology and community. It was clear to the site visit team that the school's partnership with Expeditionary Learning provides much more than a framework for curriculum design and teaching practice. The board spoke of opening meetings with EL guiding principles, and it was evident to the site visit team that the school community values collaboration and reflection. The board and school administrators reported to the team that there has been an effort to focus on the three mission themes this year.

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

Finding: Four Rivers provides a safe learning environment.

All stakeholders agreed that the school provides a safe environment for children. Families and students reported that they feel safe and welcome at Four Rivers and, unlike at previous schools that students attended, there have been no incidents of fighting or bullying. Parents did cite two small safety issues that have occurred, but mentioned the incidents so that they could speak to the school leadership's quick and appropriate response to the concerns. The school continues to be in a strong position regarding its facilities. The school buildings are newly renovated (and in the case of the high school building, newly new) and fully accessible. The administrative building is newly renovated and both the middle school and high school buildings are newly built and fully accessible. There has been deliberate planning to accommodate the upcoming expansion to grades 11 and 12. There are plans for high school lab science space.

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

Finding: Four Rivers employs teachers with extensive teaching experience and teachers who are new to the profession. The school experienced an expansion in staff for this academic year.

Tables IV and V summarize how long Four Rivers teachers have worked at the school, and how many years teaching experience they have. These tables draw information from the "Four Rivers Staff Roster, 2005-2006" which was provided to the site visit team by the school, and includes the nine core full time teachers teaching math, English, social studies, science, Spanish, and who serve as learning specialists, as well as the teacher assistants. Seven of the nine core teachers are highly qualified according to the *No Child Left Behind Act*. The two core teachers are highly qualified in one of the two core areas which they teach. All three teacher assistants are highly qualified. Both learning specialists are highly qualified.

Table IV: Teaching Experience of Four Rivers teachers

Years teaching	1-2	3-5	6-10	11-20
# of teachers	2	4	6	1

Table V: Years Spent Teaching at Four Rivers

Years at Four Rivers	1	2	3
# of teachers	6	3	4

The school has met the following Accountability Plan Goal: Four Rivers Charter School will retain qualified, committed and effective full-time teachers.

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

Finding: The Four Rivers Board of Trustees has begun to shift its attention to developing policies and prioritizing work to enable it to transition from a start-up board to a sustaining board.

The school's financial health and the acquisition and improvement of school facilities have been a strong focus of the board during the planning year and the first three years of operation. The board identified five areas of focus for its work this school year and moving forward:

1. *Board development, including recruiting new trustees.* Many of the founding trustees have membership terms that expire sometime in the 2007 and 2008 calendar years. The board spoke about their efforts to identify and recruit new trustees, and in building current trustee capacity for leadership. The board's first chair completed his term this year, and decided not to seek a second term in that position, allowing for new leadership at the board level this school year.
2. *The school's expansion to a full high school program.* The board is aware of the unique needs of a fully functioning high school program, and the importance of offering a rich array of academic and extra-curricular offerings for students. The school is exploring a collaboration with Greenfield Community College that would allow students to take college level courses at GCC. The board identified its role in this collaboration as one of facilitating the relationship and connection between the two school's administrative leaders.
3. *Strengthening the relationship of the charter school board and the foundation board in the area of fundraising and development.* The board, working closely with the finance director, has focused a large amount of its efforts on the financial health of the organization and the school's facilities needs. Now that the school is in a stronger financial situation, the board spoke of a desire to share more of the fundraising and philanthropic work with the board of the school's foundation.
4. *Continuing to solidify the financial health of the school.* The school is in the process of building a three-month operating expense reserve to additionally strengthen its financial position.
5. *Monitoring the success of the school's academic program.* The board works with the school's approved Accountability Plan, and understands its oversight responsibility as being ultimately accountable for the performance of the school. Trustees spoke of monitoring the output of the academic program, including tracking student academic achievement, teacher quality, and family satisfaction with the school.

Finding: The Board of Trustees continues to exercise an appropriate level of oversight in guiding and managing the school.

The Board of Trustees has a solid understanding of its oversight role for the school. The board has built and implemented sound policies, monitored the school's progress, and has planned effectively for the needs of the school. During the focus group interview, the Board updated the team on its reflection on this school year, and planning for the upcoming school year. The annual board retreat will be held on May 20, 2006. The two Accountability Plan goals related to board oversight and financial management of the school were met last year, and through evidence provided to the site visit team, they have been met for this year as well. The financial health of the school has been strengthened, and the school is working toward setting aside three months of operating expenses in a reserve account and a facilities reserve account.

Accountability Plan Goal 8: Board

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

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

Accountability Plan Goal 9: Finances

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

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

Finding: School leadership has been expanded this year with the addition of a leadership team.

The school administrative team is the same as last year, and consists of a team of three; the school Director, Assistant Director, and Director of Operations. This year, the school established a leadership team with representation from each division and the special education team. Job descriptions and expectations exist for each leadership team member and for the group as a whole. The team has taken on some administrative functions, including school scheduling and planning for and facilitating professional development for the school staff. In addition, team members are responsible for leading division meetings and communicating decision-making to the staff.

Finding: Decision making and communication at Four Rivers is guided by formalized policies. The school's board, administration and staff are aware of and work within the guidelines for decision making and communication that have been adopted by the school community. This fall, Four Rivers issued guidelines for decision making, called "Four Rivers Decision Making," and revisited its norms for faculty meetings and working together in a document called "Four Rivers Faculty Norms for Meeting and Working Together." These guiding documents clearly outline norms and expectations for who makes decisions and how decisions are made at the school.

Finding: As the school continues to grow, the board and administrative team are faced with the challenge of providing appropriate support to school staff. The board, staff, and school administration indicated that they believe that administratively, Four Rivers is stretched thin. The expansion to a full high school program has created programmatic needs that can not be appropriately covered by the current administrative structure. Instructional leadership, oversight and support of the academic program, and student services, including discipline, are areas of need that were identified. The board and school director both reported that the school is working to identify the best administrative and support structure, which will likely include more staff to cover these areas.

Are parents satisfied with the performance of the school?

Finding: Families are satisfied with the school. The team spoke with 11 family members, including two grandparents of a student. Family members in this focus group were highly satisfied with the school, and talked about the schools personalized approach to students and families, and the welcoming and safe atmosphere. Family members explained how their students experience learning expeditions and hands-on projects in their classes. They praised the staff, and said that they have the utmost confidence in them. Families feel that they have an influence in school based decision making, and cited several examples of how their concerns and suggestions have been acted on by school leadership.

Is enrollment stable?

Finding: Four Rivers has maintained stable and full enrollment, and is currently managing a waiting list for seats. The school reported that seven students left the school this year, and four enrolled. The school has pre-enrolled 168 students for the 2006-2007 school year, with a waiting list of 67 students. School leadership reported an increase in demand for Grade 7 spots, and the current waiting list reflects this. With this high demand and stable school population, the school has met or is well on its way to meeting all of the indicators set out for the following Accountability Plan enrollment goal:

Accountability Plan Goal 6: Enrollment:

Four Rivers Charter School will be fully enrolled each year.

- The school will reach its goal of growth by 32 students/year to full enrollment in 2007-08
- 90% percent of the students eligible and able to return to Four Rivers Charter School will reenroll for the following school year
- Applications each year will exceed the number of places available by 25%

3. Faithfulness to the Terms of the Charter

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

Finding: Four Rivers is implementing highly effective support programs for all students. Four Rivers prepared corrective actions plans and made improvements to its programs in response to the findings contained in the Coordinated Program Review (CPR) the school received from the Program Quality Assurance (PQA) division of the DOE the week of April 4, 2005.

Finding: The school has increased the number of staff to match the increased needs of its students, including adding an administrative assistant to coordinate services for students and communication with staff and families.

The school has added a part time assistant to special education administrative support. The staff maintains files, and tracks the various special education procedural due dates including scheduling required meetings. It is anticipated that the addition of this position will significantly improve timelines and procedural compliance issues raised in the school's Coordinated Program Review audit conducted in April, 2005. The additional administrative support also frees the service delivery staff to focus to a fuller extent on the needs of the students, rather than on clerical functions.

Finding: Although enrollment of students with disabilities has been fairly constant percentage of the school population since the opening of the school, special education staffing levels have been increased to better meet the needs of students with disabilities.

Special education staffing has been increased to better meet the needs of students with disabilities. During the 2005-2006 school year, the school has added 1½ special education assistants, added the special education administrative staff described above, increased a ½ time special education teacher to a full-time position, and increased the school counselor position from a ½ time to a ¾ time position.

Finding: The school has a broad array of supports available to all students that has resulted in limiting special education referrals, and allowed staff to provide more targeted support for students.

The special education program at Four Rivers is highly inclusive, and general education and special education students and teachers use the resource center and pull-out services. The school operates a Learning Center for students who require additional assistance with the general education curriculum. The Learning Center is staffed by a special educator, but is open to all students. The school also implements integrated pull-outs as needed, offers a homework club which is in session from 3:15-4:15 daily, and requires all teachers stay until at least 4:15 one day per week. Student success plans are developed as needed, describing the elements necessary for student success, including itemized contributions to be made by the student, the parents, and the school. Students with a variety of learning needs benefit from the school's project-based, hands-on educational approach and extended school day program.

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

Finding: Four Rivers has continued to document and share best practices and elements of its educational program.

Two culminating projects from learning expeditions were published in book format this year. *Keepers of the Soil: Monologues of Franklin County Farmers* sold out its initial printing of 100 books and found distribution within the school community as well as at a Community in Support of Agriculture conference and in the EL network of schools. *The Wolf that Would Forgive* sold out its first printing and received notice in local newspapers. Other dissemination activities include a program through the Western Massachusetts Writing Project entitled “Get Published!” that was a series of workshops for teachers interested in having student work published. A writing and publication workshop for 150 teachers in the Chicopee Public Schools and a presentation on standards based grading to 20 middle school teachers in Amherst were also held. As with last year, Four Rivers has hosted a diverse array of community members and leaders to visit the school at Community Open Houses, and an Exhibition Night.

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

Finding: Four Rivers is operating under a rigorous and measurable Accountability Plan.

The school’s Accountability Plan is a working document that is used by the school community. Generally, the school is making progress towards meeting, or has met many of its goals. This report cannot make any definitive statements about the plan as a whole, as many goals in the plan require evidence and data collected over a period of time – for example, as the school is in its third year with its first Grade 10 class, it does not yet enroll students at all grades in its proposed grade 7 through 12 configuration and a few goals are set for high school students and the school’s full grade configuration. In addition, the school is in the process of improving internal assessment measures, and is in the process of establishing baseline data from a number of sources in order to determine appropriate pacing of expectations for student academic improvement.

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

Finding: Four Rivers continues to make progress toward implementing the key elements outlined in its charter.

Four Rivers is guided by its mission and four basic commitments that it has made to its students, families and the community. The school has made great and focused efforts to develop an academic program and school community that focuses on each of these commitments. School leadership reported to the site visit team that they are re-visiting the three mission themes of nature, technology and community and examining their presence in the school. The school’s affiliation with Expeditionary Learning has deepened this year, with staff teaching more learning expeditions and incorporating elements of investigations into their teaching.

In addition to the Accountability Plan goals covered above, the school has set the following goals for faithfulness to charter:

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

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

Accountability Plan Goal 11: Character and Community:

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

Accountability Plan Goal 12: Expeditionary Learning:

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

Conclusion

The school community of Four Rivers is dedicated to realizing the founding mission of the school – to provide an alternative school experience to middle and high school students in Franklin County. The site visit team saw a more mature school than last year – both in terms of experience of teaching staff and in the quality of the academic program. The school has added staff to lead its expanding high school program and school leadership has worked to provide new staff with orientation to the school and to the Expeditionary Learning design. Teachers continue to refine their practice, and to integrate EL teaching methodology into their work with students and their peers.

The Four Rivers Board of Trustees continues to exercise an appropriate level of oversight of the school, and has ensured that the school has the facilities, space and funds needed to support the academic program. The school has created systems and structures for communication and decision making, and operates with a high degree of self-reflection and desire for improvement. Leadership has identified priority areas for improvement next year, including documentation and mapping of the curriculum; deepening the integration of nature, technology and community into the life of the school; providing support to teachers through supervision and evaluation; and strengthening instructional leadership, especially at the high school level.