

**NEW HAMPSHIRE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
CHARTER SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY PROCESS
CHARTER SCHOOL RENEWAL EVALUATION TEAM SUMMARY REPORT
SURRY VILLAGE CHARTER SCHOOL
MAY 26, 2011**

I. INTRODUCTION

The requirements of New Hampshire RSA 194-B:10 call for the ongoing review of charter schools. An on-site visit to Surry Village Charter School was carried out on May 26, 2011 following guidelines outlined in the New Hampshire Charter School Accountability Process. The visit was conducted for the purpose of evaluating the Surry Village Charter School on the following criteria:

1. Is the school making progress toward achieving its mission?
2. How is the school responsibly using public funds?
3. Is the school promoting student attainment of expected knowledge and skills?
4. Is the school sustainable?

Evaluation Team

Pamela Burke, Team Leader

Pam has been a secondary educator for over 40 years, serving as principal of Merrimack Valley High School from 1992-2004. She currently consults with high schools focusing on school improvement. She has served for many years as a team chair in school accreditations for the New England Association of Schools and Colleges. She holds a B.A. from the University of New Hampshire and an Ed.M in Administration, Planning and Social Policy from the Graduate School of Education, Harvard University. In 2010, she was appointed to the NH Department of Education's Charter School Advisory Committee. She is a founding board member of the Competencies, Skills, Interest (CSI) Charter School in Penacook, NH, and currently serves as Board Chair.

Susan Copley

Susan serves as the Executive Director of New Hampshire ASCD, a non-profit organization that promotes professional development. She holds a B.A. from Bates College, an M.A. in Teaching from Mount Holyoke College, and M.Ed. from UNH and a PhD from the University of Connecticut. She has served as an elementary principal in the ConVal and Oyster River School Districts, taught graduate courses at New England College and worked as a Director for Family Homes, Inc., and as a consultant for the NH Department of Education. This past year, she served on the New Hampshire Task Force on Effective Teaching.

Michelle Gauthier

Michelle has worked as an Administrative Assistant in the Commissioner's Office at the New Hampshire Department of Education as well as supporting the former Deputy Commissioner Mary S. Heath. She has a Business Administration degree from Southern New Hampshire University. Currently, she is working in the Charter School Office at the New Hampshire Department of Education under the leadership of Administrator Roberta Tenney.

Gail Taylor

Gail worked for a high-tech company in Massachusetts prior to moving to New Hampshire. She has a degree in Computer Science from Bryant and Stratton, Boston, MA. She has been with the New Hampshire Department of Education since December 2007 first working with the Math/Science Partnership (Title IIB) federal grant program and now working in the Charter School office overseeing the Charter Schools Program (CSP) federal funds.

II. Surry Village Charter School Profile

The Surry Village Charter School (SVCS) is located in Surry, NH. Currently, SVCS serves 84 students in grades K-8. Grades K-6 are located in the former Surry Elementary School and are organized in a multi-grade configuration. The recent addition of grades 7 and 8 in 2010 required additional space; these students attend school at a second campus located in Keene, NH. The students at SVCS come from the surrounding towns of Keene, Gilsum, Sullivan, Alstead, Winchester and from Surry itself.

The mission of the Surry Village Charter School as stated in their 2006 charter is to provide a challenging and rigorous education for children in an environment that emphasizes creativity, collaboration, community, diversity, service and leadership. Students will be academically and socially prepared to meet the demands of further education while maturing into productive and caring adults with a lifelong passion for learning.

Children will learn the basics of reading, writing and math and experience science and social studies through projects that emphasize everyday skills such as cooking, canning, knitting, gardening and woodworking. Music and the arts will be integrated into the daily curriculum. Surry Village Charter School seeks to foster the development of individuals and their connectedness to communities of the school, the region, the world and the natural environment.

In the 2011 charter renewal application, SVCS included the following as the final sentence of their mission:

“This is achieved through the development and implementation of a social curriculum, project-based learning, place/community-based learning and practical arts.”

The vision for Surry Village Charter School is to:

1. inspire creativity, curiosity and wonder;
2. foster the development of individuals and their connection to communities of the school, the region, the world and the natural environment;
3. enable lifelong learning for students, teachers, and families;
4. emphasize curriculum that integrates humanities, science and the arts with the mastery of basic literacy and math skills;
5. provide opportunities for students and teachers to explore subjects and content in depth;
6. utilize multiple strategies of assessment, evaluation and reporting to help students learn, to inform teachers' understanding of the child, and to include families in the learning process;
7. develop in students the critical skills that guide problem-solving, decision making and critical thinking; and
8. create a welcoming and nurturing environment for students from a diversity of backgrounds, skills, challenges, and needs.

The school is administered by a Board of Trustees, a School Director and a Curriculum Coordinator, who also serves as the building administrator for the Surry campus. The Surry campus staff includes an administrative assistant, six classroom teachers, and a part-time special education liaison. An additional teacher works with grades 7 and 8 at the Keene campus. The School Director oversees the operation of both campuses, works as a liaison with local school districts and is responsible for leading both the organizational and educational environment. The Curriculum Coordinator, housed at the Surry campus manages the Surry staff, oversees professional development for all staff and implements curriculum and programming for the school.

III. Evaluation Team Activities

Pre-Visit and On-site Materials

A pre-visit was made by the team leader Pamela Burke and team member Susan Copley on May 16, 2011. Pam and Susan met with School Director Matora Fiorey and Curriculum Coordinator Sharon Koshar, toured the Surry campus and established a working schedule for the upcoming on-site visit. Matora was asked to have samples of student work, personal learning plans and curriculum materials available to the team on May 26th. The team also used the SVCS website to access policies, procedures and curriculum documents.

In addition, team leader Pamela Burke met on May 24th with the New Hampshire Department of Education team members Michelle Gauthier and Gail Taylor to review on-site materials.

Review Team Visit Activities

The morning of the on-site, the review team met to organize the day, review protocols for classroom visits and to go over questions for parents, board members and teachers. The team then toured the facility, observed classroom instruction, and conducted Focus Groups with parents, staff and representatives of the Board of Trustees. In addition, the team leader toured the Keene campus with the School Director and observed a classroom. The team also had various opportunities to talk with the School Director and Curriculum Coordinator.

Classroom Observations

At the main SVCS campus, grades 1-6 are organized in a multi-grade configuration in three classrooms, and there is one kindergarten classroom. The team leader Pamela Burke observed the grades 7-8 classroom located in a restored colonial house in Keene. Team members visited all classrooms for 30-60 minute periods. In addition to the lead teacher, classroom aides and volunteers supported students. The Curriculum Coordinator also modeled instructional practice during class time. The team observed students engaging in multi-disciplinary activities, working in groups as well as individually.

The village atmosphere was evident in all classrooms in the main building and on the Keene campus. Students were polite, focused and worked together productively. Teachers asked probing questions to engage students and were knowledgeable about individual student needs. The samples of student work in the classroom demonstrated the focus on the natural world and the environment. Students used laptops during class, but the use of other technologies was limited.

The outdoors is an extended classroom for the school. Students have created gardens, built forts, and planted a greenhouse on the grounds. During recess, students organized their own play and needed little redirection. The natural setting of rural New Hampshire supports the school's desire to emphasize a creative education for students while connecting them to the world.

Older students at the Keene campus expressed how much they enjoyed the school and its emphasis on problem-solving and individual attention. They miss the opportunity of working with the younger students at the Surry campus and expressed a desire to spend more time on the rural arts. All students enrolled at SVCS appeared to genuinely like and respect their teachers.

Focus Groups

The review team had time throughout the day to meet with members of the Surry Village community, including parents, teachers and the Board of Trustees. Suggested focus questions were designed for each meeting although discussion varied from group to group.

Board of Trustees

What was the role of the Board in developing the mission of the school?

How does the Board support instructional improvement?

How does the Board plan to ensure long-term sustainability?

The review team met with several members of the Board including the current chair Thomas Julius, one of the founding members. The founding Board desired to create a school where kids would love to go, that would give parents choice and that would be an intimate place focused on the rural arts and believes that this vision has become more coherent through the years.

The board members are pleased with the current stability of the school after a difficult 2nd year. They believe SVCS student enrollment is a result of the efforts to improve curriculum articulation, retain staff and the move to the former Surry Elementary School. The Board was instrumental in the hiring of a Curriculum Coordinator (who serves as the building administrator of the elementary school) and hopes to hire a Student Services Coordinator for next year. The board members support the School Director and credit Matora Fiora with many of the successes over the last four years.

The Board is involved in substantial fundraising throughout the year in order to provide funds for field trips, band and art programs and to provide scholarships for the before and after school program. The Board understands the difficulty in keeping pace with the salaries of public schools and has established an Experienced Educators Fund supported by individual donors to provide competitive salaries. They are also looking for ways to improve their cash flow in order to avoid carrying “bridge loans” each year.

As board members are limited to a six-year term, Tom Julius will be leaving the Board next year. The Board is aware that his vision and devotion has sustained them during these beginning years. The board members are committed to creating systems that will survive individual members and have started actively looking for new members who will share their passion and commitment.

Teachers

How does the curriculum provide opportunities for authentic learning?

How does teacher instruction challenge students intellectually?

How do the school's beliefs determine decisions about curriculum and instruction?

The review team met with four teachers at the Surry campus during their lunch break. In addition, team leader Pamela Burke met with the teacher at the Keene campus during her visit.

All participants spoke of their liking for the small school environment, the school's focus on the rural arts, the leadership of the School Director and the recently hired Curriculum Coordinator. They are appreciative of the support of the parents and the Board. They are deeply committed to the vision and mission of the school but as teachers everywhere, they struggle with the issues of funding. Although aware of the challenges of state funding of charter schools, they spoke of the need for improved technology for students and increased professional development for professional staff.

The teachers have designed curriculum that is based on problem-solving and authentic learning. They have developed projects that require students to use "real world" settings to acquire knowledge. The teachers use rubrics to evaluate student work although, at this time, there does not appear to be a school-wide understanding of the value of common rubrics. The teachers were aware of the need for improvement of writing skills based on the New England Common Assessment Program (NECAP) and have participated in a one-day John Collins workshop. They are interested in having further discussion and training in the writing process.

Even with their concerns, the teachers at SVCS are committed to the school. They believe they are doing "important work" and are appreciative of the small class size, the administrative support and the collegial atmosphere of the school.

Parents

How do teachers personalize learning for your son or daughter?

How does the faculty show an interest in student learning and well being?

How is your child valued as a unique individual?

The review team met with a few parents after school for approximately 40 minutes. Parents had the opportunity to talk about their experiences at SVCS, as well as charter school funding.

Overall, the parents expressed a high level of satisfaction with SVCS. Parents were attracted to SVCS for a variety of reasons including: the focus on rural arts, hands-on experience, small school environment, and the opportunity to have their children in the same school through grade 8. They all felt that the school fostered independence and thoughtful behavior while providing the necessary academics. Parents liked the

opportunity for their children to have the same teacher for two years (looping), the more casual school atmosphere, emphasis on reading, and student involvement in the parent/teacher/student conferences. In addition, the opportunity to access the SVCS before and after school program was extremely important to these parents.

Over the next couple of years, parents would like to see less reliance on parent fundraising and an increase in state funding for charter schools. They also mentioned the need for more communication between SVCS and the local school districts on issues relating to special education. This may be accomplished if the new position of Student Services Coordinator can be funded.

The parents felt that their children were being provided a quality education at SVCS, and the School Director and teachers were accessible and always welcomed parents to visit the classrooms. As all parents, they have hopes for the future, but they all agreed that their children were motivated to learn and loved coming to the Surry Village Charter School every day.

Administration

During the morning tour of the Surry campus, Matora Fiorey and Sharon Koshar met with the review team and met at the end of the day with Pamela Burke and Susan Copley. In addition, the team leader met with Sharon Koshar during the day for a brief interview.

Both administrators are knowledgeable and skilled in school management. Curriculum Coordinator Sharon Koshar views her role as teacher mentor/professional resource, as well as school manager and disciplinarian. Sharon reaches out to the educational community in order to create an environment that will support the current teachers and attract newer ones. School Director Matora Fiorey is quite active in sustaining the overall vision of SVCS, always seeking to acquire additional funding, and keeping SVCS functioning smoothly. Together, as a team, they are focused on creating a positive school environment in which both teachers and students thrive personally and academically.

IV. Criteria for Charter Renewal

1) Is the school making progress towards achieving its mission?

Yes.

The mission of the Surry Village Charter School:

- a) *Is to provide a challenging and rigorous education for children in an environment that emphasizes creativity, collaboration, community, diversity, service and leadership.*

Students at SVCS have the opportunity to demonstrate their learning in a variety of ways that are tailored to their learning needs. Instruction is designed to require students to ask probing questions and to challenge themselves. They are respectful of each other and have a strong sense of community. Students who have attended the school for three years or more are performing at the state level in math and reading based on the New England Common Assessment Program (NECAP) results. In addition, their progress is measured through portfolios, individualized learning plans, projects and observations. The challenge for the school will be to determine what a rigorous education looks like for all students, and to ensure that students at the Keene campus are able to sustain the strong sense of community of the Surry campus.

- b) *Students will be academically and socially prepared to meet the demands of further education with maturing into productive and caring adults with a lifelong passion for learning.*

The Surry Village Charter School has been open for the last four years and until this year only went through grade six. Although there is anecdotal evidence that students who leave are doing well, over the next several years SVCS will need to follow former students' academic data to accurately measure this section of the mission. Certainly, the current school assessments indicate that students will have the academic skills to succeed beyond SVCS.

Teachers are also using Responsive Classroom techniques to promote a positive school climate and instill social skills.

- c) *Children will learn the basics of reading, writing, math and experiencing science and social studies through projects that emphasize everyday skills such as cooking, canning, knitting, gardening, and woodworking. Music and arts will be integrated into the daily curriculum.*

All of the SVCS classrooms displayed a great deal of evidence of the project-based learning that is at the heart of school. Academics are taught through a variety of projects, both in the classroom and in the wider community. Students participate in both group and individual activities that support the development of the rural arts skills. Music and art are integrated throughout all projects.

- d) *Surry Village Charter School seeks to foster the development of individuals and their connectedness to communities of the school, the region, the world, and the natural environment.*

SVCS provides many opportunities for students to participate both at the school and community level. Students participate in a variety of field trips and community service projects. Parents are required to donate 20 hours of service to the school and many of them chaperone as part of that requirement. The greenhouse, woods and fields at the Surry campus, and the fields and gardens at the Keene campus allow students to attend school with an understanding of the role the natural environment has on learning.

Commendations

- The strong support of the parents for the mission of the school.
- The use of the outdoor facilities and the focus on the rural arts.
- The instructional practices that allow each student to celebrate his/her individuality.
- The support of the Board of Trustees in keeping the vision and mission of the school foremost in their decision-making.

Suggestions

- Clearly articulate each section of the mission in order to include measurable objectives.

2) Is the school responsibly using public funds?

Yes.

Surry Village Charter School demonstrates financial and record keeping procedures that are acceptable for school districts. Public funding accounted for 63% of the school's revenue in 2010. An independent auditor audits the school annually. The budget process is transparent and responsible procedures are in place.

- The careful fiscal management of the Board of Trustees that ensures public funds are used in an effective and efficient manner.
- The efforts of the entire school staff to provide a quality education at less than the state average for per pupil expenditure.

3) Is the school promoting student attainment of expected knowledge and skills?

Yes. The SVCS curriculum is aligned with the New Hampshire Curriculum frameworks. The school has scope and sequence for all content and skill areas. The students are assessed using a variety of measures throughout the year, including student portfolios, personal learning plans, as well as Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS), NECAP, and Measures of Academic Progress (MAP). In addition, the teachers use the Responsive Classroom philosophy to improve social behavior of the students. This has taken some time to implement; teachers and administrators are seeing improvement as students remain at the school.

Reading is a relative strength for students at SVCS, with students who tested in the fall of 2010 achieving proficiency at the state level. For math and writing, students were below the state average. Students who attended SVCS for three or more years performed better than students who entered the school later.

The school is concerned about the lower achievement in writing as compared to the state average and has started to focus efforts in the teaching of writing. Teachers and administrators will need to determine how to best achieve improvement in this area; therefore, a school-wide agreement on strategies and methods should be implemented.

Commendations

- The use of a variety of assessment methods to measure student achievement.
- The focus on reading, which has resulted in, a high proficiency level on the NECAP results.
- The implementation of the Responsive Classroom to promote student responsibility.

Suggestions

- Develop and implement a school-wide writing process for the improvement of student writing.

4) Is the school sustainable?

Yes.

Upon entering its fourth year, SVCS has reached its enrollment capacity and now has a waiting list for kindergarten. Most students, once enrolled, continue to attend SVCS. The teaching staff has remained stable during the past three years and administrators have created a supportive working environment in order to retain good staff. The Board of Trustees functions in compliance with all public meeting laws and procedures. The move to the Surry Elementary School is an improvement over the previous classrooms in trailers.

Administrators are in place who understand the role of curriculum, instruction and assessment and who have a clear understanding of the mission of the school. The shared leadership of the School Director and Curriculum Coordinator is working well and the additional support of an on-site administrator has strengthened the Surry campus.

Surry Village Charter School works to expand its knowledge base and its sphere of influence. If the dissemination grant from the Coalition of Essential Schools becomes a reality, it will help create a network for SVCS. The review team would encourage the school to continue to find ways to connect with the local schools and educators. SVCS with its focus on experiential learning could be a welcoming resource for all New Hampshire schools.

Surry Village Charter School functions without the support of an existing school district and will continue to face fiscal challenges. Parents and teachers questioned the team members about state funding for charter schools, and are just now beginning to realize that the adequacy funding provided by the state is not sufficient to operate a charter school. The fundraising by the parents and staff is substantial and is absolutely necessary for the operation of SVCS. Without the support of generous parents and individual donors, SVCS would be faced with financial concerns.

With continued growth, SVCS will be faced with additional challenges. Surry Village Charter School is aware of the challenges to maintain a well organized, functioning school during the next five years and beyond. Parents, teachers and the Board of Trustees have created a system that can withstand the loss of staff members. At this time, there is a shared motivation and willingness to continue the necessary work needed in order to sustain the SVCS.

Commendations

- The strong and capable leadership of the School Director.
- The growth of the school over the last four years.
- The dedication of parents and community members to the school.

V. Summary of Findings

In accordance with criteria for Charter School Renewal (RSA 194-B:10), the finding of this team is that Surry Village Charter School has met the review requirements in all areas and is recommended for renewal.