I. Introduction to Charter Renewal:

**Purpose of the Site Visit**

The requirements of New Hampshire RSA 194-B:10 call for the ongoing review of charter schools. The site visit to the Seacoast Charter School on February 17, 2009 was conducted in the context of the five-year accountability process for charter schools as presented in the New Hampshire School Accountability Process. As such, the site visit was conducted for the purpose of assessing the relevance of the philosophical foundation for program development and delivery and the related strategies for governance, staffing, instructional, assessment methodologies, and community outreach.

The criteria for the sustainability of NH Charter Schools is defined as follows:

- The demonstration of the school’s progress toward achieving its mission
- The demonstration of the school’s accountability in the use of public funding
- The demonstration of the school’s promotion of student acquisition of expected knowledge and skills
- The planned sustainability of the school’s mission and the programs designed for students, families and the communities they serve

**Consistent with the established criteria, the visiting team was attentive to the following:**

- The overall educational structure and relevance of the programs and services to students, their families and their communities
- The implementation of the mission of Seacoast Charter School
- The effectiveness of the curriculum and instruction in meeting the needs of a diverse elementary school student population
- The indicators of student performance for Seacoast Charter School students in comparison to that of traditional school settings, inclusive of accommodations for education disabilities and socio-economic disadvantages
- The effectiveness of the Seacoast Charter School in terms of cost accounting, school environments, and sustainability planning

**Visiting Team participants for the site visit:**

Jane Bergeron-Beaulieu holds an M.Ed in school leadership and administration from Notre Dame College, and has over 30 years of experience in teaching and administration in the fields of special and general education. Jane also served as a special education consultant to the American School of Kuwait, and is currently an independent Education Consultant working with school districts, the NHDOE, the Southeastern Regional Education Service Center and Child Health Services. She is also an adjunct faculty member for both Plymouth State University and Rivier College.
Martha Miller holds a Master’s Degree in Integrated Arts from Lesley College, and has over 25 years experience as an elementary school teacher. She is currently a 5th grade teacher at South School in Londonderry NH. Martha has been a teacher leader in Londonderry for more than 20 years, and has been responsible for the design and oversight of the Londonderry School District Teacher Induction Program.

Barbara Jenkins holds a Master’s Degree in Curriculum and Instruction from Notre Dame College, and has over 20 years experience as both an elementary school teacher and music educator. She currently is a 6th grade teacher at the Maple Street School in Hopkinton NH, and also serves as the instructor for the Hopkinton Middle School Chorus Director.

II. DESCRIPTION OF CHARTER SCHOOL RENEWAL ACTIVITIES

Pre-visit and On-Site Materials

A pre-visit was made by the team leader on January 23, 2009 for the purpose of touring the facility, meeting staff and students, and learning more about the Seacoast Charter School mission, curriculum, professional development goals. Also discussed were the expectations and format for the February 17, 2009 NHDOE visitation. At the pre-visit, it was agreed that the following would be gathered and made available one week prior to the visit:

- The Seacoast Charter School application for renewal as submitted to the New Hampshire Department of Education (NHDOE) on August 1, 2008
- Educational mission and program goals, objectives and standards
- Policies and procedures for Seacoast Charter School
- Student performance assessments
- Handbooks and rosters
- Financial reports
- Illustration of community outreach and program publications
- Letters of support and commendation

Faculty/Staff Focus Group Discussion

The site visitation team conducted focus group discussions with faculty and staff at the Seacoast Charter School. The purpose of the discussions was to gain insight on the program structure, effectiveness and the investment of faculty and staff in the non-traditional approach to charter school programming. A primary interest was to gain insight to the understanding of staff and faculty regarding the personal and educational needs of the students at Seacoast Charter School, and how the arts are fully integrated throughout the curriculum. Additionally, information was gained regarding the curriculum, instruction and assessments that guide the programming at Seacoast Charter School.

Case Study Presentations:
As part of the visitation, staff was asked to present case studies on two students. These presentations were provided with the intended outcome of providing staff with the opportunity to review the curriculum, instruction and assessments being provided to students at Seacoast Charter School. In addition, a critical part of the conversation was a review of evidence of successful learning outcomes for students. The case study presentations were informal in nature and required staff to share a student profile, work samples, curriculum and the full integration of the arts with the visitation team. In addition, staff was asked to share assessment procedures and evidence of how student progress was measured over time.


Focus Student Group Discussions:

Student focus group discussions were conducted at Seacoast Charter School for the purpose of obtaining the observations and insights of students attending Seacoast Charter School. The student groups were informal in nature but were guided by prepared questions on program relevance and integrity, the academic supports from the faculty and the guidance extended for community based learning. Specific questions were posed to elicit responses in regard to the impact Seacoast Charter School has upon the students’ involvement in the elementary school curriculum and the integration of the arts.

Parent Focus Group Discussion:

As part of the visitation, parents were invited to participate in a focus group discussion conducted by the visiting team. The purpose of the focus group was to gain insight from parents regarding their meaningful involvement in their child’s programming, and to gain insight into general satisfaction and the extent to which students are demonstrating success.

Select Interviews

Structured interviews were held with William Wilmot, Head of School, and Susan Milovina, Assistant Head of School/Art Teacher, as well as the Board and the Accountability Subcommittee members. All of these individuals have been instrumental to the creation of Seacoast Charter School, as well as the programmatic and financial oversight to the school, as well as the sustainability of the mission and vision.

III. Seacoast Charter School Profile

The Seacoast Charter School is an arts integrated public elementary charter school, located in Kingston NH. The school was founded with 3rd, 4th, and 5th grades in 2004, beginning with 8 students. In the ensuing years, Seacoast Charter School has grown to 106 students in grades 1-6. The plan is to add grades 7&8 for the 2009-10 school year. Seacoast Charter School is poised to grow toward their goal of 160 students, and is looking forward to extending the walls of their school to connect with the community in new and different ways.

The mission of The Seacoast Charter School is to provide excellence in core academics and the arts while cultivating the individual qualities and strengths of each child.

To carry out its mission, the Seacoast Charter School is guided by the following goals, which guide the curriculum, instruction and assessment provided to all students enrolled:

• To emphasize the process of learning, as well as the product
• To incorporate the arts as a serious path to broader learning
• To foster individual growth, as well as community building
• To build a strong home/school connection

The Board of Trustees includes a variety of individuals including parents and community leaders. The board meets regularly to oversee the school’s operation, policies and planning and full collaboration with Seacoast Charter School to coordinate program development and fiscal accountability.

IV. Criteria for Charter Renewal

As established in RSA 194-B:10, the requirements for renewal of the Charter School license are defined in The New Hampshire Charter School Accountability Process which presents four distinct areas to be evaluated;

(1) Progress toward meeting the Mission of the charter school
V. Summary of Visitation Findings for Seacoast Charter School
Recommendations to the NH Commissioner of Education and the NH state Board of Education
Progress toward Achieving the Mission of Seacoast Charter School

Governance/Leadership:

The insight of the originators of Seacoast Charter School is clearly articulated in the tenets of the Mission Statement, which describes the intent to provide excellence in core academics and the arts while cultivating the individual qualities and strengths of each child. The observation of the site visitation team is that at the Seacoast Charter School, arts and academics go hand in hand, and the intent of the mission statement has been met within the current school configuration. The mission statement is alive and well, which is demonstrated through the academic success of the students enrolled. The sustaining guidance of the Board of Trustees and the full engagement of parents have proven to be an important aspect of the school’s success and sustainability. The dedicated instructional leadership of the Head of School reinforces this observation.

Commendations

- There is strong and positive parent and family engagement at Seacoast Charter School. The sustaining commitment of the parents and their promotion of the school in the greater community is impressive.
- The proactive stance of the Seacoast Academy Board of Trustees and their strong leadership has been instrumental in the growth and success of the school.
- Staff, administration and the board have committed to a shared mission and vision, which provides them with clarity and direction in making all decisions that impact the school.
- There is a universal understanding of expectations outlined in the mission and vision for the Seacoast Charter School which has resulted in strong support and programming for students, along with demonstrated academic achievement.

Suggestions

- The Board of Trustees and school administration will be well served to commence a strategic planning initiative to explore the viability of continued expansion of the Seacoast Charter School.
- Attention should be given to expanding the mission of Seacoast Charter School to have a greater presence within the local community and the local school districts. Consideration should be given to exploring collaborative learning opportunities for and with the local school districts.
- The current student enrollment is exclusively grades 1-6. The support of board and parents has enabled Seacoast Academy to explore the addition of grades 7-8. This expansion is supported by those on the visitation team.
Recommendation for Renewal:

In accordance with the criteria for Charter School Renewal (RSA 194-B:10), Seacoast Charter School meets the requirements for progress toward meeting their mission and is recommended for renewal in this category.

Promotion of Student Attainment of Expected Knowledge and Skills:

Curriculum

The arts integration approach utilized at Seacoast Charter School means that staff and students take a different approach to learning, the approach of an artist. The staff works hard to ensure that that the arts shape the way students take in new information, influence the way students process that information, and determine how students express their understanding and mastery of the required curriculum. At Seacoast Charter School staff takes the artistic process in visual art, music, theater and dance, as the model for academic learning. Each student is expected to produce their own work, learn to critique their work, and that of others, and grow from the feedback that they receive about their work. As with all true learning, this can be a difficult and frustrating process, so staff is careful to support each individual child along the way. Staff has high expectations with a great deal of patience.

The faculty and staff of Seacoast Charter School are well acquainted with the Seacoast Charter School Core Knowledge Curriculum as well as the NHDOE Grade Level Expectations (GLEs), and are adept at relating the curriculum to individual student’s academic skills and learning styles. The disciplined approach to instructional support is impressive in that it capitalizes on the integration of the arts, and emphasizes the process of learning as well as the learning product. Students demonstrate and can articulate a clear understanding of learning expectations and are self-monitoring throughout their school day. Worthy of note is that students at Seacoast Charter School are provided opportunities to develop their artistic intelligences by both infusing the arts throughout the curriculum and that the art program encourages an intensity of effort and focus that is healthy for learning. Based on this visitation, it was evident that students here engage in serious work in the arts and that they are required to think critically, generate multiple solutions to problems and pursue long term goals. As part of the academic program at Seacoast Charter School, there is full provision of special education supports and services, as well as related services for those students who have been identified and have an Individual Education Plan (IEP). In most situations, local education agencies (LEAs) contract with Seacoast Charter School to ensure special education is provided; some districts opt to provide the services themselves. In either situation, the Seacoast Charter School works as a collaborative partner to ensure that the IEPs are written aligned to the curriculum and that student progress is closely monitored.

In general it can be said that students at Seacoast Charter School are provided with opportunities to be active learners, and staff have created a learning environment where students feel comfortable taking risks, making mistakes and receiving feedback. Teachers work as a collaborative team to ensure that the curriculum is followed and that there is a coherent scope and sequence across the grades. Within each classroom the faculty is well informed of any/all students who may be identified as having an educational disability, as well as the goals outlined in the student Individual Education Plan (IEP). The Seacoast Charter School has a special education teacher on staff to work with Local Education Agencies (LEAs), in the development, implementation and monitoring of special education services, and all students who require related services such as speech and language, or occupational therapy are provided those services from the sending school district.
Commendations:

- The structure of the instructional program at Seacoast Charter School provides a meaningful environment for students’ academic development.
- The use of student portfolios is impressive.
- The school curriculum and programming is driven by systems thinking, and communication across all grades is strong, meaningful and directed toward meeting individual student needs.
- The staff recognize the benefit of ongoing professional development and welcome professional learning opportunities.
- The dedicated staff and administration of Seacoast Charter School are clearly purposeful and knowledgeable professionals.
- Staff, administration and the board are committed to continuous improvement, as demonstrated through the accountability subcommittee.
- The lines of communication with parents and families are well established and effective.
- The academic growth of students as indicated in a range of assessments is impressive.

Suggestions:

- The individual student program of studies should be expanded to include more extensive offerings in physical education, technology, consumer and family sciences, library media services and the consideration of specialized reading programming.
- While the visitation team did recognize the value that Seacoast Charter School places on professional development, it is suggested that a planned professional development program should be developed that reflects the collective suggestions of the faculty. This should be presented in a comprehensive professional development plan that directs a sequence of topics over time, and is directly connected to improved student learning.

Recommendation for Renewal:

*In accordance with criteria for Charter School Renewal (RSA 194-B: 10), Seacoast Charter School has met the requirements for promotion of student attainment of expected knowledge and skills and is recommended for renewal in this category.*

Sustainability of The Seacoast Charter School

The effectiveness of The Seacoast Charter School is realized through the commitment to the mission and vision of the school, and the basic principles that comprise the culture within the building. From the visitation team perspective, the culture and climate of the Seacoast Charter School is one that nourishes the effort of the teachers, parents, administration, and the board. The individuals within the educational community at Seacoast Charter School share leadership, and together they are unified advocates by promoting collective autonomy and embracing teaching as a distributed quality of the school. The culture and climate at Seacoast Charter School has been cultivated and nourished over time, and been allowed to evolve to ensure that the mission and vision are harnessed to support learning and continuous improvement. Based on the February 2009 visit to the Seacoast Charter School it was evident that there is a strong learning culture, which is cultivated by a visionary leader. The norms and values supporting the vision (and overall culture) are meaningfully connected to the students and parents served by the school.
Commendations:

- The experience and knowledge of the faculty is a benefit to students who enter the Seacoast Charter School.
- The culture and climate within the school is warming, welcoming and child centered.
- The facility is well kept and welcoming to students and their families.
- There are a number of learning innovations at Seacoast Charter School, all of which are purposeful, linked to improved student learning, and promote the mission and vision of the school.
- Over time, Seacoast Charter School has proven itself to be a competent system, with high expectations for all. The result has been a school that accepts accountability for the success of all students.
- Within the school there is a true sense of teamwork, collegiality, and respect for all.
- The leadership of the board and the administration are supportive and directed toward improving curriculum instruction and assessment at Seacoast Charter School.

Suggestions:

- Continue with long term strategic planning efforts

Recommendation for Renewal:

*In accordance with criteria for Charter School Renewal (RSA 194-B:10), Seacoast Charter School meets the requirements for establishing a commitment to sustainability and is recommended for renewal in this category.*

The Responsible Use of Public Funds

Seacoast Charter School has accounting procedures that are in accordance with acceptable practice for school districts to include the contracting for annual audits by New Hampshire certified public accountants. As part of the site visit, the Financial Statements for 2005, 2006 and 2007 were reviewed. The report of the independent auditors prepared by Mason + Rich Professional Association reported that; the financial statements referred to are in conformity with accounting principles generally accepted in the United States of America.

Recommendation for Renewal:

*In accordance with criteria for Charter School Renewal (RSA 194-B:10) Seacoast Charter School meets the requirements for responsible use of public funds and is recommended for renewal in this category.*
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS OF SEACOAST CHARTER SCHOOL APPLICATION FOR RENEWAL

Seacoast Charter School has presented evidence in the Renewal Application that has been validated by a comprehensive review of the school by a Site Visitation Team that meets, if not exceeds, the statutory requirements for NH Charter School Renewal.

The context of this report presents a ‘fraction’ of the evidence of the viability of Seacoast Charter School in meeting the unique learning needs of the elementary aged students who, for a variety of reasons, have not met with success in the traditional public school setting. The collective interest of educational leaders, parents’ students and the communities they represent in initiating the Charter School concept in this region of New Hampshire has been fully realized. At Seacoast Charter School, children are the center of the learning community, and there is mutual trust and respect between teachers, students, parents and the board. Seacoast Charter School is committed to a shared vision of excellence and is actively engaged in continuous improvement and program growth. Learning at Seacoast Charter School begins at the learner’s level of understanding, integrates the arts, applies to real life and thrives on high learning standards and expectations. Staff and administration model lifelong learning, perseverance, patience and creativity and are committed to the unique student population. The significance of the educational opportunities implemented at Seacoast Charter School over the past four+ years serve as a foundation for expanded opportunities in meeting the educational needs of a greater population of those elementary aged students who would benefit from an arts integration approach to learning.

The Site Visitation Team appreciates the extensive efforts of Seacoast Charter School administration, faculty and staff, and Board of Trustees in preparing for the site visit. By all accounts the visit represented a ‘normal day’ in the life of a school that ‘cares’ about the learning and purposeful development of the students they serve.


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