

River Valley Charter School

Annual Report

2008-2009

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INTRODUCTORY DESCRIPTION OF THE SCHOOL

River Valley Charter School, situated in Newburyport, is a regional school serving Newburyport, Amesbury, Salisbury, Newbury, and West Newbury. In 2008-2009, River Valley served a maximum of 288 children in kindergarten through grade eight, encompassing ages 5 to 14. In the elementary grades, each head teacher works with a full-time assistant teacher. The Middle School (grades seven and eight) consisted of 61 students, as well as a team leader and five full-time teachers. Our full-day kindergarten program served 33 students.

LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

I am pleased to present the River Valley Charter School Annual Report for 2008-2009. This was a year of celebration for River Valley. We celebrated our 10th anniversary, our best year ever on MCAS and parent participation, and we celebrated the career of our director, Dr. Dale Bishop, as he announced his resignation this spring.

As a public Montessori school, our challenge is to remain faithful to the Montessori philosophy while meeting the requirements placed on all Massachusetts public schools, including the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks, the MCAS, and No Child Left Behind. I am pleased to report that River Valley is meeting this challenge. As shown in this Annual Report, River Valley maintains a highly qualified, Montessori-trained faculty and adheres to the Montessori tradition in its teaching and learning activities, while its students consistently score well on national and state-level standardized tests. In fact, this year, River Valley's eighth-grade Language Arts scores were best in the state.

River Valley families remain highly engaged in the school community. Celebrating our 10th anniversary, we held our first Founders' Day celebration – a school-wide event for students, teachers, parents, grandparents and friends – that was very well attended. This year, 95 percent of RVCS families reported a total of 11,275 volunteer hours, and 87 percent made a donation to the River Valley Foundation.

River Valley is financially sound. As a public charter school, River Valley's finances depend on enrollment, responsible budgeting, and state funding levels. With a current wait list of more than 650 students, River Valley will continue at full enrollment. The Administration and Board have continued to manage our budget conservatively this year. As of June 30, we estimate that the school's net assets are \$1,367,319, ensuring organizational viability in the face of a difficult financial outlook for 2010 and beyond.

On behalf of the Board of Trustees, I wish to thank Dr. Dale Bishop and the faculty and staff of River Valley for their hard work and excellent results. In particular, I would like to recognize Dr. Bishop for his eight years at River Valley, building a shining example of "how to do school right." Finally, I wish to thank the parents who have entrusted River Valley Charter School with their children.

Scott Jordan, Chair
River Valley Charter School Board of Trustees

SCHOOL MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the River Valley Charter School is to provide a rigorous academic program based on the Montessori philosophy and rooted in the history, culture, and ecology of the Merrimack River Valley. Students will reach their full potential as scholars and become self-reliant, productive members of society. They will be adept at critical thinking and creative problem solving and will be fully prepared to succeed in future schools, careers, and civic life.

SCHOOL PERFORMANCE AND PLANS

The following sections report on our progress toward Accountability Plan goals and provide additional data in regards to the Common School Performance Criteria. The numbered items correspond to the River Valley Charter School Accountability Plan, dated February 10, 2004, on file at the school and at the Massachusetts Department of Education.

Faithfulness to the Charter

River Valley's mission is to provide an authentic and complete Montessori program within the public sphere. It is also to integrate regional history, culture, and ecology into the learning process, so that students become aware of both the larger world beyond school and their places in it. This, in turn, is key to the last part of the school mission, which is preparedness for future schools, careers, and civic life.

Accountability Plan Goal 3.1: Meet nationally recognized standards for high-quality Montessori education

River Valley Charter School conducts a Montessori audit each year to assure its adherence to the philosophy and practices of a high-quality Montessori school. As required by the Accountability Plan, it is a professional affiliate school member of the American Montessori Society (AMS), taking advantage of the resources available nationally from this organization for the benefit of teachers and parents. In addition, River Valley is also a member of the Montessori Schools of Massachusetts.

In the future, we plan to continue to make presentations at national, regional and local conferences to maintain our visibility. Our public and Montessori audits will continue, and we will use the data to improve our school.

Gail Supanich, a nationally recognized Montessori consultant, conducted our Montessori audit in February 2009. As required by our Accountability Plan, the audit was based on the Essential Elements of Successful Montessori Schools in the Public Sector, a document endorsed by AMS.

In her introduction, Ms. Supanich discusses the school's implementation of its mission, vision and educational philosophy: "RVCS is a model for authentic Montessori education in the public sector. They have successfully integrated the Montessori philosophy and methodology with the curriculum standards and outcomes for public education in Massachusetts. Their alignment of Montessori curriculum and state frameworks, as well as their comprehensive assessment toolset, are just two of the many exemplary outcomes of the school's goals and objectives as set forth in their mission statement. The integrity of Montessori principles has been preserved in the program through the dedication of the leadership, faculty, staff and parents of the school community."

Another indicator of the success of our program is our alumni students. These students benefit from a high-quality Montessori education as they move on to other schools. This is evident in the many accomplishments of our graduate students. Outcomes expected from a Montessori education include academic preparation, intrinsic motivation, civility, social responsibility, autonomy, leadership skills, confidence, creativity, originality, and spiritual awareness. We define spiritual awareness as a basic appreciation for life and the human condition.

Students from the River Valley graduating class of 2009 have been accepted at some of the top regional private schools, as well as at vocational and agricultural high schools. These schools include Governor's Academy, Gould Academy, St. Thomas, Whittier Vocational Technical High School, Essex Agricultural High School, St. John's Prep, Central Catholic, Pingree, Waring, and Tabor Academy.

Accountability Plan Goal 3.2: Acquire and maintain community partners for both curriculum and service in our surrounding region. River Valley teachers will individually cultivate curriculum partners, as well as create opportunities for community service.

Partnerships are a key component for the teachers, students and parents of River Valley Charter School. It is through the interactions with community organizations within our region that we are able to enrich our

curriculum and, in turn, serve our community. Through the relationships we develop, we are meeting the goals of our mission: to be rooted in the history, culture and ecology of the Merrimack River Valley.

We identify two types of partnerships as part of our Partnership Program. The first type of partnership is the classroom curriculum partnership, which is developed and established with environmental and historical associations and human service organizations both national and international in scope. Partnerships in this area are within individual classes or are school-wide in nature. The second type is a school-wide partnership. This type consists of relationships with schools and universities, local community groups, Montessori organizations and training centers, and human services groups. These partnerships address the school-wide community and benefit both the partner and River Valley.

This year, the focus of our curriculum partnerships was on local history, culture, ecology and stewardship. While maintaining current partnerships with local historical sites, we sought to develop stewardship as a focus. We are fortunate to be able to maintain an ongoing and solid relationship with Salem State College as a school-wide partner in professional development for reading and literacy. As a result of this partnership, we developed a project incorporating the City of Newburyport's planning commission, a professor at Salem State, and an upper elementary group of eight students. This team created a historical pamphlet and produced a video that aired on public access television about changes in Brown Square in Newburyport over the past 100 years. In addition, we shared this research with the Mayor of Newburyport and the Associate Dean of Education at Salem State College.

While we had previously developed a partnership with the Newburyport Preservation Trust, our connections became deeper this year. What began as a request for a letter of support from teachers and students to the city of Newburyport to restore a powder house and the surrounding historical site, became an effort to develop curriculum tools for local schools about Newburyport history. The ensuing dialog created an opportunity to collaborate and discuss social studies curriculum design that could connect River Valley and Rupert Nock Middle School upper elementary and middle school programs. This effort is the beginning of a project which will span grades four through eight for the coming two years, using the local public access channel as a means of creating an audience for the students to share their historical research projects.

Our Atlantic Salmon Project is another example of the concept of stewardship. We have maintained a partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for the past nine years and, this year, there were two classes raising salmon. An additional project was developed with the Parker River National Wildlife Refuge to educate others in the community. Elementary students created a mural and additional displays at the Visitors Center. The students now maintain three tanks, one of which is located at the Center, where visitors may observe and record data about the salmon. Through these efforts, the students are not only learning but sharing their knowledge with the community.

A final example of the stewardship piece of the curriculum partnerships program is the three-day fall trip for 60 middle school students to St. Gaudens' Studio and National Historic Site in Cornish, New Hampshire. Working with the National Parks Service staff, students were able to use the site as a means of understanding the role that memorials play in the preservation of history. Teachers and students participated in water quality testing, data collection of plant and animal species, and individual study of sculpture. Students were also involved in interactive presentations about Classicism, making life masks, first-person interpretations of members of the Massachusetts 54th Regiment, reflective journal writing, and presentations before the entire group. Teachers, park staff and students were all a part of the immersion. River Valley students also created a book documenting their experiences that was presented to the National Parks Service, along with teacher lesson plans. Students and staff presented highlights from their experience at the New England League of Middle Schools Conference in March, which provided an opportunity for us to share best practices with teacher from all over New England. Visitors to the site also benefit from a more engaging experience thanks to the materials our students and teachers left behind.

Our partnerships strengthen our ties to the community, and our students develop skills in becoming self-reliant, productive members of society. These partnerships fulfill the requirements laid forth in our charter: to acquire and maintain curriculum and community service partnerships in the community. Teachers and students are actively involved in the development of the partnerships and share ownership of the work done for the community at large.

Classroom Curriculum Partners 2008-2009						
Curriculum Partner	Focus Areas	School-Wide Involvement	Kinderhaus	E1	E2	Middle School
American Montessori Society, NYC	Professional Development, Dissemination	X				
Amoskeag Fisheries, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, NH	Marine/Estuarine Ecology (salmon nursery and release program)			XX		
Anna Jacques Hospital, Newburyport	Personal Health, Education (career day)			XXXX		X
Atria-Merrimack Place, Newburyport	Culture			X	X	
Bura, Kenya: Sister City Program	Global Studies, Leadership				X	X
Central New England Fisheries	Education on the salmon raising process			XX		
Chewonki Environmental Education Center, ME	Ecology, Conservation (alternative energies)				XX	
David Davies, Architect, Newbury	History, Culture, Ecology (pavilion project)	X				
Free the Children	International Children's Rights Organization					X
Greater Boston United Nations Association	Local Organization for Global/Local Connections					X
Gulf of Maine Institute (GOMI)	Ecology, Stewardship, Leadership					X
Harvard Forest, Petersham	Forest Ecology				X	
Heritage House, Newburyport	History, Culture (oral history and aging)			X		
Ipswich River Wildlife Sanctuary	Ecology (forests and fields study)			XX	XX	
Joppa Flats Education Center, Mass. Audubon, Newburyport	Bird Banding, Research, Ecology (understanding our barrier island, Baltimore oriole data collection)			X	XXXX	X
Kids as Peacemakers, Newburyport	Peace Education	X				
Lowell's Boat Shop, Amesbury	Marine History, Culture (rowing site)	X				
Massachusetts Environmental Education Society	State-Wide Ecology, Dissemination, Professional Development			X		
Maudslay State Park, Newburyport	Ecology (forests and fields study)			X	XX	

Curriculum Partner	Focus Areas	School-Wide Involvement	Kinderhaus	E1	E2	Middle School
Montessori Model United Nations	Global Studies, Leadership Initiative					X
Montessori Schools of Massachusetts	Professional Development, Dissemination	X				
National Park Service Augustus St. Gaudens NHS, Cornish, NH	Arts and Science Integration into Historical Context of Memorials and Legacy Project					X
Newburyport Fire Department	Health, Safety, Community		X			
Newburyport Preservation Trust (Saving Our History)	History, Culture, Local Schools, Curriculum				XXX	
Newburyport Department of Public Works	Caution Labels on Storm Drains, Education of Local Residents				XX	
Newburyport Public Schools	Curriculum for Health, Social Studies	X	X	XXXX	XXXX	X
Newburyport Tree Committee	Ecology (tree planting project)				XXXX	
Overlook Farm, Heifer International	Global Studies, Leadership, Culture, Hunger Awareness Meal				XXXX	X
Parker River Alpaca Farm	Agriculture			X		
Parker River Clean Water Association	Ecology			X		X
Parker River National Wildlife Refuge, Newbury	History, Culture, Ecology (understanding our barrier island)			X	XX	X
Pennies for Poverty	Map of Community Service Opportunities for Students	X				
Rings Island Rowing Club, Salisbury	Rowing, Water Safety, History, Culture, Dory Maintenance, Student Leadership	X				
Salem State College	Collaborative Faculty Grant*, Dissemination, Interns**, Reading/Writing Course Site	X		**	* **	
Spencer-Pierce-Little Farm, SPNEA, Newbury	Agriculture, History, Ecology, Culture	X				
Trustees of Reservations, Newbury	History, Culture, Ecology, "Quest" Development				XX	
United States Dept. of Fish and Wildlife, Parker River Wildlife Refuge	River Study, Ecology, Geology, Professional Development	X				
Totals		11	2	13	14	12

This school year, our curriculum partnerships developed a great deal through integration and stewardship opportunities with multiple organizations. It has been exciting to see that organizations are more willing to work with River Valley, such as Newburyport High School, Anna Jacques Hospital, Newburyport Preservation Trust, the Town of Newburyport, and Salem State College. A new partnership involving Parker River National Wildlife Refuge, the Gulf of Maine Institute and River Valley Charter School is in the developmental stage. We are able to coordinate efforts and make successful curriculum connections for all organizations involved.

The three strongest focus areas of curriculum partnerships remain the history, culture and ecology of the Merrimack River Valley. We are able to maintain strong relationships with 11 ecological organizations, seven cultural organizations and five historical organizations.

As required by our charter and Accountability Plan, River Valley students remain highly committed to community service. They have greatly exceeded their goals for community service hours again during the 2008-2009 school year. This can be seen when looking at the hours reported for our exit-level students (Kinderhaus, grade three, grade six, and grade eight). Our 33 Kinderhaus students had a total of hours 112 this year, which averages to a little more than 3 hours per child. Our 34 E1 students performed 5,627 hours, for an average of 166 hours per child. Our 29 E2 students had a total of 4,689 hours, for an average of 162 hours each. Finally, our 29 Middle School students performed 3,861 hours of community service, for an average of 133 hours per student. Overall, our exit-level students performed a total of 14,289 hours of community service this year. While this number is impressive, it does not even include non-exit-level students in grades one, two, four, five and seven.

River Valley students are genuinely interested in using their talents and resources in service to their school and home communities. The modeling by parents and faculty in their service to the school and the community at large has been an inspiration to our students, who have become involved in humanitarian work through both classroom activities and personal endeavors. Their involvement is a work of the heart that has helped create a school culture for generosity for other humans' needs and for the care of the environment both near and far.

Our school community is committed to the concept of giving both time and money. Closely related to many of our curriculum partnerships, these outreach activities are diverse and also meet a particular need of the partnership. The philosophy behind community service at River Valley is that the projects are student driven and grow from their work in the curriculum. This approach leads to experiences of substance for our students. The widely held view of community service as a service-learning component in education best describes these experiences. Following are examples of community service projects completed by our students during the 2008-2009 school year.

Environmental Projects

- Weekly recycling by our Green Team, an interactive program for students and teachers to learn how to reduce, reuse, and recycle classroom materials. Students were awarded certificates from the state and given recognition by their teachers.
- Students planted trees for the Newburyport Tree Committee again this year.
- Elementary students presented to the City Council on behalf of not feeding geese in the city, as they were gathering in large groups and had become a nuisance.
- Two classrooms raised salmon fingerlings and released them into the Merrimack River.
- A class collected newspapers from school families throughout the year to deliver to the Parker River Alpaca Farm for use in litter boxes and then later for composting into fertile soil.
- Students collected data on air and water temperature and conducted fish counts for the Parker River Clean Water Association.
- School-wide, students participated in eliminating disposable lunch packaging by reusing washable containers from home each day.

Humanitarian Projects

- Jump Rope for Heart/Hoops for Heart event raised \$863 for the American Heart Association and continued to create awareness for healthy heart behaviors for children.
- Walk for Breast Cancer by students and parents raised money for research.
- A class coordinated a school-wide weekly collection of food for the Pettengill House, a local food pantry for those in need.
- Students participated in the Annual Hike for Hunger to benefit the Pettengill Food Pantry.

- Students participated in the Shaws' Grocery Store food drive by making posters and posting them throughout the area.
- The Kinderhaus class raised money for the Muscular Dystrophy Association through participation with the Newburyport Fire Department.
- Classes continued their work in intergenerational activity at Merrimack Place, a retirement facility in Newburyport. Students read with the elders and listened to stories about their life experiences. They took treats and planted flowers.
- Each year, a class plans entertainment for the residents of Heritage House, another retirement home in the area. They sing, read poetry, and perform skits. They also bake and deliver refreshments for the residents.
- Our after-care coordinator helped students raise money through a math-a-thon for the children of St. Jude. This same program raised money for Shriners' Hospitals for Children.
- The River Valley after-school program also participated in the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society's Pennies for Patients Program by collecting and donating pennies.
- A class raised money for Vest-A-Dog to pay for bullet-proof vests for police dogs.
- Families donated 128 winter coats to Coats for Kids, a community-wide project that collected 64,000 coats.
- A class continued to raise funds for the Merrimack River Feline Rescue Society in Salisbury.

International Projects

- Middle School students once again participated in the Free the Children project through our association with the MMUN group trip to the UN. Students developed the Walk for Water project and a 24-hour Vow of Silence to raise money for Free the Children.
- Our students' 2008 trick-or-treat efforts resulted in a gift of \$930 to the U.S. Fund for UNICEF. The money helps children in developing countries survive through the provision of vaccines, nutrition, and shelter.
- The school was recognized by the Rosalyn and Jimmy Carter Center for a class's efforts for peace.

Also, there are many ongoing community service projects within the school. Volunteer efforts included: classroom-to-classroom "reading buddies," shoveling snow around the school, set-up for concerts and other events, our "flag team" (students who raise and lower the American flag on the school's front lawn each day), and older students acting as escorts for Kinderhaus children during dismissal.

The relevance of curriculum partnerships and community service learning projects is ultimately global in perspective. The work focuses on leadership, implications for peace education, and the connections stated in the school's mission statement for learning about cultures, governments and peoples of nations throughout the world and their relationships to the Merrimack River Valley region.

Implementation of Mission, Vision, and Educational Philosophy

The mission and vision of the school is to provide a high-quality Montessori education, and our Montessori audit substantiates our efforts. Our ongoing curriculum partnerships provide students with the opportunities to develop critical-thinking and problem-solving skills, while learning about the history, culture, and ecology of the Merrimack River Valley. We read about and collect information from local papers citing the accomplishments of our alumni students and can see that they have indeed reached their full potential as scholars and become self-reliant, productive members of society.

Academic Program Success

While we can neither predetermine nor specifically characterize each student's full scholarly or personal potential, we can expect to see evidence of it through attainment of a well-designed curriculum and assessment system. The River Valley Assessment Toolset combines the Montessori Scope and Sequence with the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks and provides integrated learning objectives for each of the planes of development served by the school.

Accountability Plan Goal 1.1-1.6.4: We expect at least 80 percent of our students to meet or exceed the documented learning objectives for each of the four exit levels (Kinderhaus, Elementary 1, Elementary 2, and Middle School) in each of six defined curriculum areas.

The results for 2008-2009 are as follows.

In all of the six defined curriculum categories – mathematics, language arts, cultural (science and humanities), critical thinking, creative problem solving, and personal and social development – students have not only met but have in most cases exceeded our exit-level goal of 80 percent.

These assessments are determined by the classroom teachers based on information from student portfolios, daily observations and recordings, curriculum tracking sheets, and progress reports, all components of the River Valley Toolset. Ongoing teacher training and refinement of these documents will help us to measure accurately future student performance.

A whole-child approach to assessment, which includes the River Valley Toolset as well as external standardized tests, is used to measure a child’s progress throughout the year as well as to determine student retention. Comparisons of internal assessments against external test data show strong correlations, indicating evidence of the viability of our assessment Toolset. In other words, a Kinderhaus student with low TerraNova test scores will most likely demonstrate similar performance weaknesses on his progress report, student portfolio and other Toolset documentation. Based on this evidence, this child may be retained or be considered a candidate for additional support services.

Percent of Students Who Met or Exceeded Documented Learning Objectives				
	Kinderhaus	Elementary 1	Elementary 2	Middle School
<i>1.1 Mathematics</i>	100	91	100	100
<i>1.2 Language Arts</i>	94	94	100	100
<i>1.3 Cultural (Science and Humanities)</i>	100	94	100	100
<i>1.4 Critical Thinking</i>	100	91	100	100
<i>1.5 Creative Problem Solving</i>	97	91	100	100
<i>1.6 Personal and Social Development</i>	94	91	100	100
<i>1.6.1 Self-Motivation</i>				
<i>1.6.2 Self-Reliance</i>	97	94	100	100
<i>1.6.3 Respect for the Prepared Environment</i>	100	94	100	100
<i>1.6.4 Community Service</i>	<i>na</i>	100	100	100

Notes to the table:

- 1.3 Cultural (Science and Humanities): At the Middle School level, these two subject areas are averaged together. All of our Middle School students have met or exceeded the documented learning objectives for both science and humanities.
- 1.4 Critical Thinking: Teachers use their observation logs and student portfolios to support their evaluations of these life skills.

- 1.5 Creative Problem Solving: Teachers use their observation logs and student portfolios to support their evaluations of these life skills.
- 1.6.1 Self-Motivation: This information is derived three times a year from individual student progress reports, and it is based on teacher observations. In Kinderhaus, this information comes from the progress report sections called “logical thinking/problem solving” and “social development.” For E1 students, this information comes from the progress report sections called “personal development” and “work/study habits.” For E2 students, this information comes from the progress report sections called “life skills” and “work study.” For Middle School students, this information comes from the progress report section called “personal and social development.”
- 1.6.2 Self-Reliance: This information is derived three times a year from individual student progress reports, and it is based on teacher observations. In Kinderhaus, this information comes from the progress report sections called “logical thinking/problem solving” and “social development.” For E1 students, this information comes from the progress report sections called “personal development” and “work/study habits.” For E2 students, this information comes from the progress report sections called “life skills” and “work study.” For Middle School students, this information comes from the progress report section called “personal and social development.”
- 1.6.3 Respect for the Prepared Environment: By this we mean exhibiting appropriate behaviors so that every student can focus on learning, respect for the learning environment and materials, respect for others, and completion of the work cycle. This information is derived three times a year from individual student progress reports, and it is based on teacher observations.
- 1.6.4 Community Service: The original River Valley Charter School Accountability Plan required that students perform a certain number of community service hours at various exit levels of their education. All of our third-year students (34) and sixth-year students (29) have met or exceeded their community service goals. The third-years needed a minimum of 15 cumulative hours, and the sixth-years needed 30 hours. The Middle School students needed to acquire a grand total of 50 cumulative hours during their time at River Valley. All of the 29 graduating Middle School students acquired the desired number of hours, which means that 100 percent of the students had achieved the goal. Overall, all 92 River Valley Charter School exit-level students, or 100 percent, reached their goal.

Standardized Test Results

River Valley administers the TerraNova test every year to every student. It also administers the MCAS as required by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Because test scores do not constitute outcomes in and of themselves, we do not have specific goals for test results beyond what is stated in the school charter (“significantly above state and national averages”). Rather, we use test results as an analytical tool to aid in setting future goals with the child. These results are also monitored over time to see the child’s progress and to determine appropriate instructional strategies.

River Valley Charter School has achieved Adequate Yearly Progress according to the No Child Left Behind Act.

TerraNova

The TerraNova test has been given every year since the inception of River Valley Charter School. Following a thorough summary of this data, we can make the following generalization:

- *The longer students attend River Valley, the higher their performance on the TerraNova test.*

Analysis of TerraNova testing for the 2008-2009 school year indicates that the Median National Percentile Total Scores for River Valley students had a low range of 59 (which occurred in the first grade) to a high range of 88 (which occurred in the fifth grade). For all groups taking the TerraNova, River Valley students exceeded

the national average of 50 percent on their Total Score (comprised of reading, language, and mathematics). The results demonstrate that our students exceeded the objective set out in our charter.

Median National Percentile – River Valley Total Scores	
	Percentile in '08-'09
Kinderhaus	<i>na**</i>
1 st Grade	59
2 nd Grade	74.5
3 rd Grade	70.4
4 th Grade	85
5 th Grade	88
6 th Grade	87
7 th Grade	87.3
8 th Grade	87.7

**TerraNova Achievement Test, Version II – this test is not nationally norm-referenced.

MCAS

A total of 188 River Valley students in grades three through eight participated in the MCAS test in spring 2008. The results of these tests have been compared to state averages, as well as analyzed longitudinally to identify strengths and weaknesses of our academic programs.

Using the CPI calculations from the 2008-2009 No Child Left Behind Report Card for River Valley Charter School and for the state, one can see that River Valley students outperform their state peers on all of the 14 tests. Test scores remain “very high” in ELA and “high” in Math, with significant improvements in CPI Math scores from 2007 to 2008.

Following is a table of scores for the spring 2008 MCAS for both River Valley and the state. Note the small sample size (*n*) for River Valley, which is between 29 and 34 students.

Percentage of Students' Scores on MCAS in Each Category									
	River Valley					State			
	<i>n=</i>	A	P	NI	W	<i>A</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>NI</i>	<i>W</i>
3 rd -Grade Reading	33	15	67	15	3	<i>15</i>	<i>41</i>	<i>33</i>	<i>11</i>
3 rd -Grade Mathematics	33	18	39	42	0	<i>25</i>	<i>36</i>	<i>25</i>	<i>14</i>
4 th -Grade ELA	33	9	39	48	3	<i>8</i>	<i>41</i>	<i>39</i>	<i>13</i>
4 th -Grade Mathematics	33	12	55	27	6	<i>20</i>	<i>29</i>	<i>38</i>	<i>13</i>
5 th -Grade ELA	29	11	68	21	0	<i>13</i>	<i>48</i>	<i>30</i>	<i>8</i>
5 th -Grade Mathematics	29	28	38	31	3	<i>22</i>	<i>30</i>	<i>30</i>	<i>17</i>
5 th -Grade Science and Technology/Engineering	29	17	48	34	0	<i>17</i>	<i>33</i>	<i>38</i>	<i>12</i>
6 th -Grade ELA	34	21	68	12	0	<i>15</i>	<i>52</i>	<i>24</i>	<i>8</i>
6 th -Grade Mathematics	34	18	35	47	0	<i>23</i>	<i>33</i>	<i>26</i>	<i>18</i>
7 th -Grade ELA	29	17	76	3	3	<i>12</i>	<i>57</i>	<i>23</i>	<i>8</i>
7 th -Grade Mathematics	29	31	28	31	10	<i>15</i>	<i>32</i>	<i>29</i>	<i>24</i>
8 th -Grade ELA	30	27	73	0	0	<i>12</i>	<i>63</i>	<i>18</i>	<i>7</i>
8 th -Grade Mathematics	30	30	27	33	10	<i>19</i>	<i>30</i>	<i>27</i>	<i>24</i>
8 th -Grade Science and Technology/Engineering	30	0	43	57	0	<i>3</i>	<i>36</i>	<i>39</i>	<i>22</i>

(Key: A= Advanced P= Proficient NI= Needs Improvement W= Warning)

River Valley vs. State (CPI Scores)														
Grade	3	3	4	4	5	5	5	6	6	7	7	8	8	8
Test	ELA	Math	ELA	Math	ELA	Math	Sci.	ELA	Math	ELA	Math	ELA	Math	Sci.
River Valley	92.4	86.4	81.8	85.6	92.9	86.2	88.8	96.3	83.1	96.6	82.8	100	79.2	82.5
State	81.5	81.5	77.6	78.1	83.9	76.2	77.6	86.2	77.6	87.3	71.8	89.3	72.0	69.1

- Comparing CPI scores, River Valley students outperform their state peers on all 14 of the MCAS tests.
- On ELA tests, River Valley students scored an average of 9.0 CPI points higher than their state peers.
- On math tests, River Valley students scored an average of 7.7 CPI points higher than their state peers.
- On science and technology tests, River Valley students scored an average of 12.3 CPI points higher than their state peers.

Comparative Grade-Level Data: River Valley vs. Sending Districts and State

Using composite scores (weighted averages) in ELA, Math, and Science/Technology, River Valley students generally outperform students from the sending districts, scoring higher on 13 out of 14 tests. In grades three through seven, River Valley students outsourced students from the sending districts in every test.

Using composite scores (weighted averages) in all of the six Reading/ELA tests, River Valley students outperformed local sending districts. River Valley students scored an average of about 4.6 points higher than their district peers on these tests.

River Valley vs. District and State (CPI Scores)															
Grade	3	3	4	4	5	5	5	6	6	7	7	8	8	8	
Test	ELA	Mth	ELA	Mth	ELA	Mth	Sci	ELA	Mth	ELA	Mth	ELA	Mth	Sci	
Amesbury	86.6	88.2	76.0	78.4	88.0	74.0	80.9	87.7	72.8	91.6	78.1	91.2	75.3	75.0	
Haverhill	75.9	76.0	72.0	71.2	78.4	71.6	75.7	81.7	71.0	85.2	65.7	86.9	67.9	69.1	
Newburyport	86.8	82.2	76.2	76.4	90.1	82.6	80.8	94.3	81.5	91.8	73.4	95.9	84.4	81.7	
Pentucket	89.4	86.3	84.1	85.6	88.9	85.9	86.1	95.2	92.0	93.0	86.3	93.3	79.2	78.2	
Triton	87.8	88.4	83.0	80.8	87.8	83.2	86.3	95.6	88.6	98.3	80.9	94.3	76.4	75.6	
Composite	86.81	84.65	77.68	78.10	88.80	80.72	81.89	92.76	81.30	91.86	76.52	94.00	80.25	78.56	
<i>River Valley</i>	<i>92.4</i>	<i>86.4</i>	<i>81.8</i>	<i>85.6</i>	<i>92.9</i>	<i>86.2</i>	<i>88.8</i>	<i>96.3</i>	<i>83.1</i>	<i>96.6</i>	<i>82.8</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>79.2</i>	<i>82.5</i>	
State	81.5	81.5	77.6	78.1	83.9	76.2	77.6	86.2	77.6	87.3	71.8	89.3	72.0	69.1	

- In five of the six Math tests, River Valley students outperformed local sending districts. River Valley students scored an average of about 3.6 points higher than their district peers on these tests.
- In each of the two Science/Technology tests, River Valley students outperformed local sending districts. River Valley students scored an average of about 5.5 points higher than their district peers on these tests.

River Valley vs. District and State (CPI Scores) Students with Special Needs, Grades 3-8		
Tests	ELA	Math
Amesbury	66.14	55.02
Haverhill	62.14	50.83
Newburyport	69.21	56.09
Pentucket	72.7	61.05
Triton	74.01	63.97
Composite	69.62	57.59
<i>River Valley</i>	<i>85.5</i>	<i>68.6</i>
State	65.9	55.3

- River Valley students with special needs outperformed their state counterparts on the MCAS tests. The State average CPI scores for special needs students in ELA and Math were 65.9 and 55.3, while River Valley students' average CPI scores were 85.5 and 68.6, respectively. The differences were 19.6 for ELA and 13.3 for Math.
- River Valley students also outperformed their peers from the local sending districts. The composite CPI scores for sending district special needs students in ELA and Math were 69.62 and 57.59, while River Valley students' average CPI scores were 85.5 and 68.6, respectively. The differences were 15.88 for ELA and 11.01 for Math.

According to the River Valley Charter School Accountability Plan, the school must biannually commission an independent educational consultant from outside the Montessori sphere to assess academic performance in the context of national public education. In 2008-2009, this public school audit was conducted by SchoolWorks as part of River Valley's charter renewal site visit. Excerpts from this report follow.

“RVCS employs a broad spectrum of assessment methods that include internally-developed assessment tools (the River Valley Assessment Toolset), student portfolios and standardized tests. RVCS has mapped a comprehensive Montessori curriculum that is aligned with the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks and is documented in the form of learning objectives for every multi-age group. The RVCS Toolset combines the Montessori scope and sequence with the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks and provides integrated learning objectives for each of the four levels served by the school.”

“Across all years of the charter term, more than 80% of the students at RVCS have met or exceeded documented learning objectives in all six areas. The school measures student performance through the analysis of student performance data from internal and external assessments, as well as standardized tests. RVCS has successfully commissioned biannual audits of its academic program by a non-Montessorian educator to ensure that the school's educational program continues to be rigorous and aligned with national education standards.”

Curriculum

In a Montessori education, curriculum, instruction and assessment are purposefully integrated. The River Valley curriculum integrates the Montessori Scope and Sequence with the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. This allows us to demonstrate clearly our accountability to public education standards and assures that our students will be fully prepared to enter the next phase of their education – public or private – when they graduate from River Valley. The whole-child approach of the Montessori curriculum integrates the development of self-reliance, independence, and respectfulness with academic work. As the child matures, he begins to use his personal and social skills to inform and evaluate his own work through individual and group self-assessment.

An interdisciplinary approach arises naturally from Montessori's Five Great Lessons and from the project orientation of the Montessori curriculum. For example, two of the lessons are the Story of Language and the Story of Numbers. As young elementary children study the Story of Language, they develop an understanding of grammar, imagining the first words that were uttered and what parts of speech they might have been. As they study the Story of Numbers, they might practice writing and computing in Egyptian, Chinese, and Roman numerals. This work is also integrated into continent studies.

Instruction

Students are respected as both unique and competent, with an innate desire to learn. They are empowered to direct their own learning within the structure of the curriculum, with the close guidance of the teacher, and with an understanding of their individual learning styles. (In many Montessori schools, teachers are referred to as guides.) Each student has an individual learning plan, the design of which he takes an increasingly active role in as he matures.

Long work periods are a primary means of enabling focused, self-paced work in a Montessori school. Students are given a three-hour block of time devoted to learning, preferably in the morning. Despite the limited school day, the demand for special subjects (art, music, and physical education), and the difficulties in juggling schedules of part-time specialist teachers, all classrooms have the mornings undisturbed.

River Valley utilizes multi-age classrooms with three-year age spans in the elementary program and two-year spans in the Middle School to maximize curriculum options, encourage cooperation, and foster self-confidence in students who serve as role models. Our Elementary 1 program has had the full spectrum of 6- to 9-year-olds since opening. Elementary 2 started with 9- to 11-year-olds and expanded to ages 9 to 12 in the second year. Middle School started in 2001-2002 with seventh grade and reached its full capacity of seventh and eighth grades in 2002-2003. The Kinderhaus is a one-year program due to current early childhood funding restrictions.

Classrooms are arranged in learning centers, with clusters of student-sized tables and open areas for floor work. Students are allowed to move about the classroom and choose resources, working individually or in small groups. We were fortunate to be able to specify the build-out of the property we are leasing and so could design classrooms that are large, open, and light-filled and that include a “practical life” area with a sink, counters, and a tiled floor. Each class has the flexibility to set up its space as desired. While each classroom has a distinct personality, they all include live plants and animals, beautiful aesthetics, space divided according to areas of study, and a peace corner or quiet area.

Montessori materials are designed for many levels of understanding, beginning with the concrete and moving to the abstract. Materials are self-correcting and reinforce autonomy, confidence, and self-motivation. We budgeted for and acquired a full complement of the beautiful and scientifically designed Montessori materials before opening in September 1999; our budget provides for maintaining this inventory. Our teachers and Montessori auditors have been pleased with how well stocked our classrooms are.

“Going out” is a basic Montessori element of experiencing the world outside the classroom in a meaningful way. Depending on the age of the student, this can mean anything from counting fish stock in a local river or serving meals at a soup kitchen to taking stewardship of farmland or apprenticing to a tradesperson or artisan.

River Valley teachers are expected to track individual student progress using the River Valley Toolset, which will be outlined in the Program Evaluation section. They must also guide students in their mastery of the concepts required for our documented learning objectives. These are conveyed to teachers through ongoing faculty meetings and to students through individualized learning plans and progress reports.

Program Evaluation

As a general practice, River Valley does not utilize specific programs for learning, but rather focuses on individualized learning plans.

The River Valley Toolset is an internal assessment system based on our documented learning objectives. The Toolset integrates the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks with the related Montessori lessons to provide learning objectives for each of our exit levels: Kinderhaus, grade three, grade six and grade eight. Our learning objectives are in line with those of the state, yet we establish an individualized rate of learning based on the understanding that each child learns at his or her own pace.

As part of a Montessori teacher’s training, they build their own albums of lessons for each subject area. These albums are comprehensive lesson plans that are systematically arranged to maximize learning. The lessons within these albums are listed on the curriculum tracking sheets used by teachers to document individual academic success in relation to learning objectives.

Each Montessori lesson has prerequisites that the child must meet, and these accomplishments must be observed and recorded by the teacher prior to introduction of a new lesson. Specific aims, or learning objectives, for each lesson are identified, which explicitly state the targeted skills that should be demonstrated by the student. Over time, the instructor utilizes a three-period lesson: introduction of new material, observation of the student

successfully using the material, and a student presentation to the teacher or peers to show the student's mastery of aims set forth in the lesson.

The standards for measurement within the River Valley Toolset are based on the Montessori lessons, the learning objectives, and the curriculum tracking sheets. We use a four-point scale to define levels of proficiency on our progress reports. A four-point system is used consistently at all levels, K-8, on the tracking sheets and the progress reports. The four-point scale for Middle School progress reports is based on numbers. We saw a need to convert to a numerical system so that high schools receiving our transcripts could easily translate our standards of measurement and levels of proficiency. Middle School tracking is accomplished by using learning objectives and the Montessori Scope and Sequence in conjunction with progress reports.

The definitions of our four-point scale are listed here for clarification.

River Valley Charter School Standards for Measurement	
I	Introductory Level -The student is developing a knowledge base for further exploration.
W	Working Level -The student has a knowledge base for further exploration. The student is moving towards independent practice of skills.
P	Proficient Level -The student consistently demonstrates skills and understanding. The student is capable of self-directed exploration.
A	Application Level -The student is internalizing and assimilating knowledge. The student is able to effectively share knowledge and creatively apply understanding.

As a form of external assessment, River Valley uses standardized test scores such as TerraNova and MCAS to determine student and school performance. Thorough and ongoing analysis of this test data by the school director and faculty is conducted in order to review our academic programs for quality and effectiveness.

As part of a review of our Middle School program, we found last year that students were in need of additional mathematics support. Therefore, as a means of improving individual student performance, River Valley instituted an online individual learning program this year titled Study Island. This program helped all Middle School students to improve their knowledge of pre-algebra and algebra and to operate at an individualized pace. From each student's results, teachers and administrators used the evidence to guide and inform future instruction.

School Culture

River Valley students must abide by a Code of Conduct that embraces the Montessori philosophy of grace and courtesy. Furthermore, faculty and parent handbooks set the tone for behavior and involvement. The Montessori environment is a balance of two interdependent elements: students' freedom to explore and think for themselves and their responsibility to work and learn within the community. With the autonomy to manage time and make choices, students acquire a sense of ownership for their own growth and development. They accept responsibility for setting goals and completing assignments, as well as for being contributing members of the group.

The classroom culture helps free teachers from constant disciplining and allows the students to concentrate on their work. This culture promotes an atmosphere of order, calm, and civility. There are three overriding expectations for students' behavior while at school:

- **Purposeful activity:** Students are engaged in their studies. Positive attitudes toward work develop as part of the classroom culture and are inculcated from the first day.
- **Responsibility:** Students take an active role in their own education. They help create their individual learning plans and weekly work plans. They learn to contribute to the maintenance and management of their own communities. They are expected to contribute to the larger community.

- **Respect:** Students are respectful of themselves, others, each other's work, their classrooms and materials, and the environment.

In continuing with a multi-year plan of establishing a school-wide behavior management system, we continued to implement an Open Circle program in our Kinderhaus and elementary classrooms. This program promotes a common language of behavior and communication between students and adults. Teachers were sent to training programs and parent education programs were held at the school.

During the 2008-2009 school year, only one River Valley student was formally disciplined by receiving an out-of-school suspension. This student was given a two-day suspension for inappropriate behavior.

Diverse Learners

River Valley completed a full Coordinated Program Review in October 2008. River Valley received several commendations in this report. The evaluator made the following statements.

“The administration, the staff, and the parents have established a community based upon the Montessori philosophy that demonstrates a strong commitment and dedication to providing an education to all students that creates seamless connections across the curriculum, promotes student self-assessment and fosters a learning environment where students and teachers are sensitive to the diverse learning styles and needs of each other as individuals and as members of the classroom and school communities.”

“Collaboration, collegiality, communication and professionalism are manifested daily in the interactions among school personnel. The school places a high value on professional development and curriculum initiatives that are relevant and innovative, appeal to the whole child, and emphasize the ability of each student to evolve and mature within the curriculum. There are extensive efforts made to ensure that when school personnel are introduced and trained in new areas, this knowledge is effectively embedded in practice and the implementation of curriculum and systems initiatives are effective and relevant to the student population.”

“The administration and teaching staff have established a comprehensive system of continuous monitoring and evaluation to assess the ongoing effectiveness of all aspect of the programs. There is a curriculum in place that ensures each student has the opportunity to progress academically and socially as an integral part of the school community. The Administrator of Special Education provides the impetus, the foundation and the oversight to ensure that the level and quality of special education services and programs are consistently implemented, maintained and evaluated in accordance with the school's educational philosophy and standards and the federal and state educational regulations and requirements.”

Supervision and Evaluation of Teachers

As part of the faculty evaluation process, the Board formulates its goals at its annual retreat in June, and then they work with the Director to create his annual goals. During the summer, the teachers receive a letter articulating the Director's goals and are asked to write their own annual goals. In the fall, the Director meets with the teachers to review and clarify their professional goals, and the lead teachers replicate the process with their assistants. In the spring, the Director meets with the lead teachers to review each teacher's progress and documentation of their goals. The lead teachers and assistant teachers repeat the same review process, and all documents are placed on file in the Director's office. The standards used for evaluation purposes are stated in our faculty goal-setting documents.

As a means of improving instruction and as part of our formative teacher evaluation process, the Curriculum Coordinator and Assistant Director carry out classroom observations. Montessori training center supervisors visit and assess their student teachers who are in the process of completing Montessori training. Our Middle School teachers have begun videotaping their lessons and participating in peer evaluation discussions on effective teaching methods. Additional evidence pertaining to the capabilities of our teachers can be found in our Montessori and public school audit reports.

At River Valley Charter School, teacher evaluation is a formative process. Teachers are given feedback as a means of improving instructional skills and overall student performance. If a teacher fails to meet his goals, he may not be re-hired.

Professional Development

River Valley's school-wide professional development focus for the 2008-2009 school year was on Montessori's prepared environment and aesthetics. During an August visit to the Peabody Essex Museum in Salem, our staff used the museum's Chinese exhibits as a model to discuss how better to prepare the learning environment for our children. We have learned that professional development opportunities have directly improved teaching and learning. During our Montessori audit, the evaluator made comments about each classroom's prepared environment as a means of improving and evaluating our learning environments. We chose to focus on the classroom environment because it is an essential Montessori concept. As a result of our activities, the classrooms are more organized and thoughtfully re-designed. We can see that the classroom appearances have improved, and this was our method of measuring the effectiveness of these activities.

As a means of improving assessment strategies and saving time, the Elementary 1 and Kinderhaus teachers learned about and implemented the MRX Assessment Program. This computerized model of assessment will facilitate the recording of teacher observations and assessments and help them develop better reports and more accurate tracking of each student. Elementary 2 teachers developed observation strategies to improve instructional, observational and assessment skills. Middle School teachers focused on re-designing the Middle School schedule, documentation of our eighth-grade capstone event, and project groups. This resulted in a dramatic improvement in the quality of our eighth-grade projects.

Professional development activities throughout the year also included faculty study groups, Montessori training, professional conferences, Open Circle training and observations. We have begun to use classroom observations, training center site visits and peer observations and video review as a means of improving instructional practice. We will continue to develop and revise these formative professional development strategies in the forthcoming years.

Organizational Viability

River Valley strives to provide a strong and reliable infrastructure to support the school's learning community in both the short and long term. We look at our organizational performance in six categories: finance, staffing, enrollment, governance, dissemination of best practices, and family participation.

Accountability Plan Goal 2.1: Sound financial management

The financial statements and information in this report have been prepared by the management of the River Valley Charter School and are unaudited. Our audit for the fiscal year ended June 30, 2008, performed by independent auditors, was issued with no material findings, reportable conditions or instances of noncompliance. The financial position of the School continues to be stable, with no need for borrowing to fund operations anticipated at this time. Total revenues of \$3,317,331 exceeded the revised budget of \$3,276,683 for the fiscal year ended June 30, 2009 by \$40,647. Tuition revenues and facilities aid of \$3,044,935 in total exceeded the revised budget of \$3,039,923 for the fiscal year ended June 30, 2009 by \$5,012. The average rate per pupil was \$10,573, based on a planned enrollment of 288 students. The School budgeted \$3,320,255 in operating expenses for the fiscal year ended June 30, 2009. Actual expenditures of \$3,299,668 resulted in a savings of \$20,587 for the fiscal year ended June 30, 2009. The fiscal year ended June 30, 2009 revised budget planned for a net operating loss of \$15,000. Accordingly, the Board of Trustees approved the use of \$15,000 of the unrestricted net assets at the fiscal year ended June 30, 2008 to fund the expected operating loss and approved an additional amount of up to \$15,000 in April 2009 for Director search expenses. In June 2009, the Board of Trustees approved additional adjustments in the amount of \$19,396 to revise the budget for the fiscal year ended June 30, 2009. This was to carry forward grant revenues to the fiscal year ended June 30, 2010 for

amounts not expended in the fiscal year ended June 30, 2009. River Valley Charter School reported a positive net change in assets of \$17,663 for the fiscal year ended June 30, 2009.

The School's Statement of Net Assets is strong, with total unrestricted net assets of \$1,367,319 and a total cash position of \$1,330,965 as of fiscal year ended June 30, 2009. The School has no long-term debt. Liabilities are largely limited to short-term accruals, and there is no need for borrowing to fund operations. The cash position compares well to the School's projected quarterly expense structure, which amounts to roughly \$824,917 per quarter, giving the School some financial protection against unforeseen expenses or the anticipated negative changes in the macro economic and political climate.

The budget presented for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2010 school year reflects a planned enrollment of 288 students. The School management and Trustees are committed to continuing the present programs even with the projected decrease in tuition revenues. Revenues have been budgeted for fiscal year ending June 30, 2010 in the amount of \$3,242,845, a decrease over the fiscal year ended June 30, 2009 budget of \$33,838. The Trustees have approved an operating budget for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2010 with expenditures of \$3,242,845, a decrease from the fiscal year ended June 30, 2009 budget of \$77,410. The School approved the balanced budget with a \$50,000 increase in contingency funds to protect against the probable continued downward adjustment of tuition revenues. River Valley Charter School remains financially stable, and we will continue our record of fiscal responsibility through conservative budgeting, accurate fiscal management and continued development efforts toward future independence and sustainability.

Accountability Plan Goal 2.2: Progress toward financial independence from changing economic and political climates

Like most nonprofits, River Valley Charter School Foundation experienced reduced giving this year, down from last year by about \$20,000, or 13.8 percent. We can account for this difference entirely with two \$10,000 gifts in fiscal year 2008 that were not expected to, and did not, recur in 2009. Many in our first ring of donors, our families, were affected by the economic downturn and were unable to give at previous levels or unable to fully meet pledge commitments, which brought family contributions down 21.2 percent from last year. Nevertheless, the parent participation rate was as high as it has ever been, surpassing the last two years at 87 percent. In addition, corporate and alumni giving were both up approximately 10 percent.

The following table summarizes income results for the year.

	Actual 6/30/2008	FY 2009 Goal	FY 2009 Actual	Over/(Under) Goal	Change from FY 2008	Percent Change
Parent Donors	\$62,085	\$62,000	\$48,934	\$(13,066)	\$(13,151)	-21.2%
Nonparent Donors	\$25,803	\$7,500	\$13,010	\$5,510	\$(12,793)	-49.6%
Corporate/Foundation	\$54,825	\$60,000	\$60,661	\$661	\$5,836	10.6%
Alumni	\$1,600	\$1,200	\$1,755	\$555	\$155	9.7%
Total	\$144,313	\$130,700	\$124,360	\$(6,340)	\$(19,953)	-13.8%

Accountability Plan Goal 2.3: Long-term retention of highly qualified faculty and administration

Our administrative team remained intact for the 2008-2009 school year, for a retention rate of 100 percent. One assistant teacher left during the 2008-2009 school year (4 percent). This teacher retired to raise her newborn child. Three teachers (11 percent) finished the school year but will not be returning in the fall. Thus, the administration and faculty retention rates well exceed our Accountability Plan goal of 75 percent each.

Of our head teachers in grades K through six, 100 percent are Montessori trained or are engaged in training for the level at which they teach. This meets our Accountability Plan goal of having 90 percent of head teachers Montessori trained.

Accountability Plan Goal 2.4: Professional development opportunities for faculty and administration to meet the needs of the school

This past year, 100 percent of our faculty and administration met individual professional development goals. Documentation of professional development activities and faculty goal setting is on file at the school. This exceeds our Accountability Plan goal of a minimum of 75 percent meeting their professional development goals.

Accountability Plan Goal 2.5: Wait list adequate to meet the school enrollment objective of at least two applications per opening each year

In June 2008, 30 students graduated from River Valley. Withdrawals over the summer of 2008 equaled four. An additional two students transferred after the school year began in September. This created a total of 36 openings for the 2008-2009 school year.

Applications that were lottered in February 2008 totaled 175. The existing wait list prior to this lottery numbered 535. The total number of applications available for this school year was 710. For 36 openings, that is a ratio of 19.7 applications per opening in the school; this well exceeds our requirement of having two applications per opening. Significant local advertising, opportunities for parent observations, and a strong reputation in the community have resulted in large numbers of applications. We expect the interest in River Valley to remain high in future lotteries.

Accountability Plan Goal 2.6: High rate of returning students — goal is at least 85 percent of non-graduates

Only four non-graduate students completed the 2007-2008 school year but did not return for the 2008-2009 school year, for a student retention rate of 99 percent. This well exceeds our goal of 85 percent. We feel that our strong academic program and school culture continue to promote the reputation of our school, which results in high rates of retention.

Accountability Plan Goal 2.7: Board of Trustees that provides appropriate stewardship of the school

The Accountability Plan establishes three measures for this outcome:

1. Achievement of all goals as set during annual Board retreat

The Board of Trustees set the following goals for the 2008-2009 school year:

- **Ensure renewal of our school charter:** The Board worked with the Director to revise the charter renewal application, which had been submitted in 2007 but was not reviewed by the Massachusetts Department of Education. The Board also participated in the renewal site visit, which took place in October 2008. Our charter was renewed on February 24, 2009 with no conditions.
- **Make a decision to lease or buy our facility:** Our Site Committee conducted negotiations with our landlord, Day's Landscaping Inc., LLC. The Site Committee recommended that we renew the lease at 2 Perry Way through August 31, 2014, with an option to renew through 2019. The Board voted to accept the recommendation, and the lease has been renewed.
- **Create a Memorandum of Understanding to document the relationship between the Board of Trustees and the Foundation:** The MOU Committee has developed a draft Memorandum of Understanding. Due to the change in school leadership which occurred July 1, we will continue to define the relationship between the school, Foundation Directors, and the Board of Trustees with respect to fund raising and will continue the work of this committee into the 2009-2010 school year.

2. Biennial external audit of Board operations

The Board hired consultant Marci Cornell-Feist of Meetinghouse Solutions to conduct the external Board audit. This consisted of interviews with Board and school leadership, as well as an extensive self-evaluation, which was discussed at a working session with the consultant. The following key strategic issues were addressed: conducting a search for a new director; communication with internal stakeholders; long-range strategic planning; and streamlining Board operations. Ms. Cornell-Feist provided best-practices materials, which will be used as we continue to refine Board operations. In her summary, she stated, “Your ability to be reflective, learn and your thoughtful urgency during our April 2nd Board development session were truly remarkable. You are quite a team and should feel great about all you are accomplishing.”

3. Less than 25 percent intra-term trustee turnover

One of our 14 voting members stepped down at the end of June before completing their second three-year term. This gives us a 7 percent intra-term turnover rate.

Accountability Plan Goal 2.8: Continue to foster River Valley Charter School as a model for public Montessori programs

Please see “Dissemination” on page 22.

Accountability Plan Goal 2.9: High levels of family participation at all levels of school life

Families are a critical component of River Valley’s organizational viability. Family support helps us provide many school activities and programs that would not occur otherwise.

A goal of attaining high levels of active family participation, both in community service and by financial contributions, is an important component of our Accountability Plan. This year, 95 percent of our families recorded a combined 11,275 hours of service, which exceeds our goal of having a minimum of 80 percent of families contributing volunteer hours.

Furthermore, each of our families is required to perform a minimum of 40 volunteer hours, and our goal is to have 60 percent of families attain this objective. This year, 55 percent completed their required 40 hours of parent participation. While we did not meet this goal, the overall number of volunteer hours increased 4 percent this year over last year’s figure. We believe the economy had a negative impact on the number of families who were able to volunteer this year, as many parents were working more hours. In the future, we need to be more aggressive in collecting this information from parents, as we believe that many hours went unrecorded this year.

Accountability Plan Goal 2.10: High percentage of families contributing financially to the school

Our current Accountability Plan calls for 50 percent of families to participate in the annual fund. We have consistently and significantly surpassed that goal by encouraging every family to contribute financially at a meaningful level for their budget. This year, 161 or 87 percent of River Valley families donated, compared to 138 or 75 percent of families last year. The amounts were down from previous years – some at just a few dollars – reflecting the state of the economy, but we’ve never seen a higher rate of family involvement.

Policy Decisions

The Director communicates with the Board Chair and Executive Committee regarding suggested policy changes. Changes are submitted to the appropriate Board committee. The committee makes a recommendation to the full Board, which votes to approve or amend the policy. The Board made the following major policy decisions in 2008-2009.

- Approved the RVCS charter renewal application
- Approved changes to the Board of Trustees Bylaws as requested by the Charter School Office
- Approved a Student Information Release Policy dated October 14, 2008

- Established an ad hoc Foundation Memorandum of Understanding Committee to draft an MOU between the Board of Trustees and the RVCS Foundation
- Authorized the transfer of \$200,000 from the Newburyport Five Cents Savings Bank to the Provident Savings Bank to diversify holdings
- Approved a Non-ERISA Specimen 403(b) Plan – deferral only – for the benefit of the school’s employees.
- Accepted the audited financial results for the fiscal year ended June 30, 2008
- Established an ad hoc Director Search Committee to recruit and identify candidates for the position of School Director for recommendation to the Board of Trustees
- Resolved that the Chair shall request of the RVCS Foundation a pledge in the amount of \$200,000 to the school budget for the purpose of general support to the 2009-2010 budget
- Authorized the Chair to enter into negotiations with Director candidate Jeanne Schultz as recommended by the Search Committee

Amendments to the Charter

The Board of Trustees made a minor amendment to the school bylaws, at the request of the Charter School Office. This primarily involved clarification of the responsibilities of the Board of Trustees in relation to the school Director. The changes were approved by the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Complaints

The Board of Trustees received two complaints from parents during the 2008-2009 school year. Following the Board’s grievance procedure, these complaints were referred to the Board’s Grievance Committee.

The first complaint was filed by a joint-custodial parent regarding the inclusion of a former spouse in a matter that involved a River Valley staff member’s concern about the safety of their child. The Grievance Committee reviewed the written complaint, as well as written and verbal explanations from River Valley administration. The matter was resolved when the administration wrote a letter to the complainant explaining the school’s position, and the grievance was closed.

The second complaint came from a parent who stated that a Board member had spoken poorly of her to another Board member within earshot of her child. The Grievance Committee reviewed the written complaint and found that it lacked merit. The matter was not considered further.

Oversight

The Director provides a monthly written report to the Board of Trustees that mirrors the Accountability Plan. In addition, the Executive Committee provides management oversight on a monthly and as-needed basis, and the Accountability Committee meets monthly to assess the school’s progress in meeting its Accountability Plan goals.

Annually, the Director is reviewed by the Executive Committee. The primary input to this review is the school’s performance relative to the Accountability Plan. In addition, parents’ input is gathered through an annual survey, and faculty input is provided on an ongoing basis by the faculty representative to the Board of Trustees.

Board Planning

Annual Board goals are established within the framework of the Accountability Plan and are detailed in this report. An additional Board goal this year was to secure a Director to replace Dr. Dale Bishop, who announced that he would resign at the completion of his contract in June 2009. Our Search Committee reported on its progress at each Board meeting this spring. The Committee made a recommendation in late May to hire Jeanne Schultz, and the Board voted to approve the recommendation. Ms. Schultz has accepted the position and began July 1, 2009.

Family Satisfaction

River Valley conducts an annual parent survey to measure the rate at which families are satisfied with the school's programs. The results from our 2008-2009 Parent Survey stated that 97 percent of the parents strongly agreed or agreed that the overall education at River Valley is excellent. Additionally, the survey showed that 94 percent of parents strongly agreed or agreed that the quality of the school environment is excellent.

Financial Oversight

During River Valley's charter renewal site visit in October 2008, the inspection team stated the following: "River Valley Charter School has exhibited sound financial management with careful financial planning and oversight."

In order to establish priorities within each year's budget, the Director and Business Manager collect information. The school Director and Business Manager each track and collect local economic and political news in order to carefully plan their upcoming revenue sources. River Valley Charter School has the added challenge of drawing students from five local districts and, thus, must look at news from each area. The Director uses a faculty budget survey tool to assess the needs of the teachers and their classrooms. In addition, the Curriculum Director, Assistant Director, Office Manager, Special Education Director, and Middle School Coordinator also have input into the data collection process. The Business Manager reviews technology needs with our IT consultant, and those needs are also factored into the overall budget process. The Director also performs research and analysis of comparable salaries in the local area. Based on all of this information, the Business Manager and Director identify priorities and allocate the funding.

The information is presented to the finance committee, and all Board of Trustee members are invited to participate in the discussion. As a result of these meetings, the school prepares an annual operating budget of revenues and expenses. In preparing the budget, the Business Manager looks at historical revenue, as well as spending over time. The budget is reviewed and approved by the Board of Trustees at the June Board meeting and modified throughout the year, as necessary. The Board's finance committee meets to review a report of the actual revenue and spending compared to the budgeted amount each month and also to discuss cash management. Financial statements displaying budget vs. actual results, cash flow and a statement of net assets are prepared quarterly by the Business Manager and reviewed by the Board Treasurer and presented to the full Board of Trustees at a monthly Board meeting.

Dissemination

An important part of River Valley's charter is dissemination of information about our "Montessori made public" pedagogy throughout the local and national community. River Valley Charter School defines best practices as activities that contribute to developing high-quality curriculum, instructional strategies, forms of assessment and leadership for the school that promote the ideals of our mission statement. In sharing our educational practices with outside educators, institutions, and the general public, we have become a model for Montessori education in the public and private sectors.

In the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's 2009 Best Practices and Dissemination Guide, River Valley was cited for its "Montessori made public" best practices. The article highlighted the River Valley Assessment Toolset, our DVD, and the Massachusetts Montessori Public School conference we hosted last year.

River Valley was featured in the summer 2009 issue of Public School Montessorian, a national Montessori publication. River Valley was highlighted as a model Montessori charter school with a highly skilled teaching staff and a unique Middle School program. This article also touted the River Valley Assessment Toolset and the Massachusetts Montessori Public School conference. In response to the article, we've had several requests for information about our best practices.

In 2008-2009, River Valley shared its curricular materials, policies, assessment toolset, special education program, and instructional strategies with educators from around the country, including California, New York, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Arizona, New Hampshire, and Oregon. We even hosted two guests from New Zealand and shared similar documentation. Additionally, we provided curriculum partnership materials for the newly chartered Gloucester Community Arts Charter School.

In 2004, a Massachusetts Department of Education Dissemination Program Grant helped us to fund a 20-minute video/DVD that highlighted “Montessori made public” education in three schools: River Valley, a school in Jefferson County, Colorado, and one in Yonkers, New York. We continue to share our “Montessori made public” DVD with a wide range of people. In fact, we sent this DVD to the American Montessori Society’s Executive Director and Senior Director of Accreditation. Our new DVD, featuring River Valley alone, was screened for nearly 200 guests during our annual fund-raising breakfast in 2009. This event also showcased several students who shared some of their learning experiences.

We redesigned our school Web site this year to give visitors easier access to more information about the school.

Our teachers attended and presented at various conferences, including the New England League of Middle Schools Conference (where teachers made five presentations) and the Montessori Schools of Massachusetts Conference (where teachers made three presentations).

River Valley Views, monthly tours of the school, are offered to various members of the community and local region as a means of sharing our best practices. Visitors spend time in classrooms at each grade level, observing students and seeing public Montessori in action. We have invited other educators from private and public schools, executives, higher education faculty, politicians, local school committee members, and local and state government leaders to both River Valley Views and private school tours throughout the year. This year, we have had an exceptionally high number of visitors from local and regional public schools. These activities continue to promote River Valley’s reputation and status.

River Valley hosted graduate students from several institutions, who conducted research and observations and participated in internships. These students came from Lesley University, Harvard University, NYU, and Salem State College. We also hosted an internet safety night to which parents from local school districts were invited.

River Valley also participated in other dissemination activities, including increasing newspaper presence, participating in surveys, having students speak at local Rotary meetings, continuing our community outreach program, and providing teacher training and professional development opportunities.

FINANCIALS

RIVER VALLEY CHARTER SCHOOL

Statement of Net Assets

June 30, 2009

ASSETS	
Current Assets	
Cash and cash equivalents	\$ 1,330,965
Contribution receivable	50,000
Grants receivable	3,483
Accounts receivable	6,223
Prepaid expenses	8,249
Total current assets	1,398,920
Capital Assets, Net	182,992
Other Assets	
Deposits	37,451
Total assets	\$ 1,619,363
LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS	
Current Liabilities	
Accounts payable	\$ 16,282
Accrued payroll	232,677
Deferred grant revenue	886
Other current liabilities	2,199
Total current liabilities	252,044
Net Assets	
Unrestricted:	
Invested in capital assets	182,992
Unrestricted	1,184,327
Total unrestricted net assets	1,367,319
Total net assets	1,367,319
Total liabilities and net assets	\$ 1,619,363

**** Please note that this statement is preliminary (unaudited). The River Valley Charter School's financial year ends June 30, 2009 and additional adjustments may be required.**

River Valley Charter School

Statement of Revenues, Expenses and Changes in Net Assets for the Year Ended June 30, 2009

July 2008-June 2009

Operating Revenues:			
	State allocation for tuition	\$	3,044,935
	Program service fees		77,299
	Federal government grants		73,174
	State government grants		29,800
	Private grants		6,464
	Total operating revenues		3,231,672
Operating Expenses:			
	Salaries		2,041,670
	Occupancy		430,150
	Fringe benefits		179,874
	Other instructional services		96,848
	Payroll taxes		88,977
	Direct program contract professional services		67,116
	Maintenance of buildings and grounds		65,746
	Information management and technology		45,430
	Utilities		44,537
	Instructional supplies and materials		36,645
	Staff professional development		40,504
	Contract professional services		30,307
	Depreciation		29,771
	Insurance		26,457
	Supplies and consumable expenses		13,355
	Office supplies and materials		11,747
	Dues and association fees		8,982
	Maintenance of equipment		8,131
	Legal fees		7,539
	Equipment lease and rental		7,339
	Advertising and recruitment costs		4,405
	Travel		4,386
	Contributions to outside organizations		4,034
	Postage and printing		3,714
	Meals and lodging		1,864
	Other		140
	Total operating expenses		3,299,668
	Operating Income		(67,996)
Nonoperating Revenues:			
	Grant		49,123
	Interest income		22,654
	Contributions		6,886
	Fundraising		4,603
	Miscellaneous income		2,393
	Total nonoperating revenues		85,659
	Change in net assets		17,663
	Net Assets - Beginning of Year		1,349,656
	Net Assets - End of Year	\$	1,367,319

**** Please note that this statement is preliminary (unaudited). The River Valley Charter School's financial year ends June 30, 2009 and additional adjustments may be required.**

RIVER VALLEY CHARTER SCHOOL
Approved School Budget - Passed June 25, 2009
Fiscal Year July 2009 - June 2010

	Approved Budget Overview 2009-2010 July 1, 2009-June 30, 2010	% of Total Budget 2009-2010 July 1, 2009-June 30, 2010
STUDENT ENROLLMENT	288	
Operating Revenue:		
State allocation for tuition	\$ 2,875,404	88.67 %
Federal government grants	110,841	3.42
State government grants	27,600	0.85
Program service fees	15,000	0.46
Total operating revenue	3,028,845	93.39
Nonoperating Revenue		
Private grants and fundraising	200,000	6.17
Interest income	14,000	0.43
Total Nonoperating Revenue	214,000	6.60
Total Revenue	3,242,845	100.00
Expenditures		
Administrative expenses	365,070	11.26
Instructional services	1,854,890	57.20
Other student services	68,150	2.10
Operation and maintenance of plant	581,440	17.92
Benefits and other fixed charges	311,900	9.61
Non operating expenses	61,395	1.89
Total Expenditures	3,242,845	100.00
Excess of Revenue Over Expenditures	-	- %
Unrestricted net assets, June 30, 2009	1,367,319	
Unrestricted net assets, June 30, 2010	1,367,319	

DATA SECTION

Instructional Time:	
Total number of instructional days for the 2008-2009 school year:	180
First and last day of the 2008-2009 school year:	Sept. 4, 2008- June 22, 2009
Length of school day (please note if schedule varies throughout the week or the year):	8:30 a.m.- 3:10 p.m.

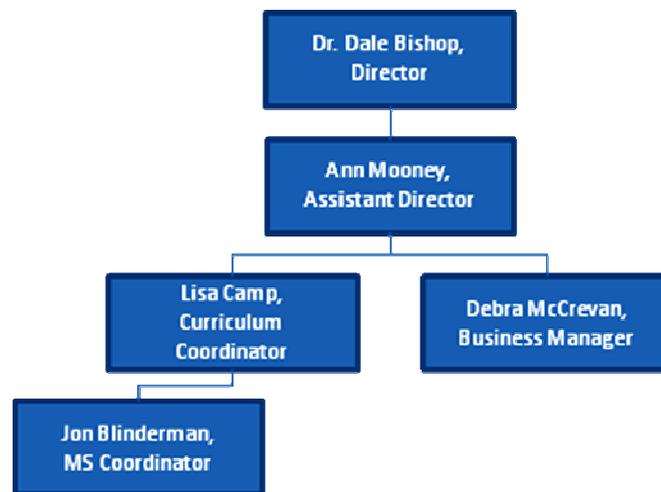
Student Enrollment Information:	
Number of students who completed the 2007-2008 school year but did not reenroll for the 2008-2009 school year (excluding graduates):	4
Total number of students enrolled as of October 1, 2008:	289
Total number of students who enrolled during the 2008-2009 school year, after October 1, 2008:	1
Total number of students who left during the 2008-2009 school year, after October 1, 2008:	2
Total number of students enrolled as of the June 2009 SIMS submission:	288
Number of students who graduated at the end of the 2008-2009 school year:	29

For students who completed the 2007-2008 school year but did not return for the 2008-2009 school year, the following reasons were given: “special education needs (1)”; “re-entering child into local community” (2); and “new school academically rigorous – offers foreign language, strong sports program, strong music and art programs (1).” For students who left during the 2008-2009 school year, the following reasons were given: “need for educational change (1)”; and “choosing to home school (1).”

STUDENT DEMOGRAPHIC AND SUBGROUP INFORMATION		
(for students enrolled as of the June 2009 SIMS submission)		
Race/Ethnicity	# of students	% of entire student body
African-American	2	1
Asian	11	4
Hispanic	8	3
Native American	0	0
White	257	89
Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander	0	0
Multi-Race, Non-Hispanic	10	3
Special Education	51	18
Limited English Proficient	0	0
Low Income	0	0

ADMINISTRATIVE ROSTER FOR THE 2008-2009 SCHOOL YEAR			
Title	Brief Job Description	Start date	End date (if no longer employed at the school)
Director	Acts as superintendent of school	07/01/2001	7/23/2009
Assistant Director	Acts as principal of school	07/01/2001	6/30/2009
Middle School Coordinator	Manages Middle School students, plans trips, and coordinates classes	9/01/2007	6/30/2009
Curriculum Coordinator	Coordinates K-8 Montessori curriculum	09/01/1999	6/30/2009
Business Manager	Maintains financial oversight	01/01/2000	N/A

In addition to completing this table, please provide an organizational chart including administrators' names and titles.



TEACHER AND STAFF ATTRITION FOR THE 2008-2009 SCHOOL YEAR			
	Number as of the last day of the 2008-2009 school year	Departures during the 2008-2009 school year	Departures at the end of the school year
Teachers	37	1	5
Other Staff	16	0	3

One teacher left during the 2008-2009 school year to have a baby. Five teachers left after the end of the 2008-2009 school year for the following reasons: one teacher resigned; and four teachers left to accept positions elsewhere. Of the other staff, two left to accept positions elsewhere, and the other staff member's program has been restructured.

BOARD MEMBERS FOR THE 2008-2009 SCHOOL YEAR

Name	Position on the Board	Committee affiliation(s)	Area of expertise, and/or additional role at school (parent, staff member, etc.)	- Number of terms served; - Length of each term, including date of election and expiration
Susan Baldwin	Treasurer	Finance, Exec, Development, Search	Regulatory Economics, Parent	1 term; 3 yrs. served: 9/9/06-6/30/09
Dale Bishop	ex-officio trustee	Finance, Exec, Accountability	Director, RVCS	8 yrs. served: 7/1/01-6/30/09
Wendy Carmichael	Development Chair	Committee on Trustees, Develop., Search	Education, MBA, Ed. Publishing, Parent	1 term; 2 yrs served: 10/5/07-6/30/10
Christine Cohen	Trustee	Accountability, Search	Education, SPED, Parent	1 term; 1 yr. served: 7/1/08-6/30/11
Lauren Eramo	Trustee	Accountability, Search	Education, Gov't, Parent	1 term; 1 yr. served: 7/1/08-6/30/11
Lisa Graham	Co-Vice Chair; Co-Chair COT	Exec., Committee on Trustees, Grievance, Search	Recruiting, Operations, Parent	2 terms; 6 yrs. served: 7/8/03-6/30/09
Pamela Hallock	Trustee	Accountability, Grievance	MS Chemistry, Education	1 term; 1 yr. served: 7/1/08-6/30/11
Christopher Horan	Site Chair	Site, Exec., Finance Search	Comm. Real Estate, Parent	1 term; 2 yrs. served: 10/5/07-6/30/10
Margaret Henry	Secretary	Exec., Committee on Trustees, Grievance, Search	Montessori School Head	1 term; 3 yrs. served: 9/9/06-6/30/09
Scott Jordan	Chair	Exec., Committee on Trustees, Finance, Site, Grievance, Search	MBA, Finance, Gov't, Parent	1 term; 2 yrs. served: 10/5/07-6/30/10 (also 11/5/02-2/2/03)
Alfred Link	Trustee	Finance, Committee on Trustees, Search	Marketing, Communications, Parent	1 term; 1 yr. served: 7/1/08-6/30/11
Ann Mooney	ex-officio trustee	Exec., Finance, Accountability	Asst. Director, RVCS	8 yrs. served: 7/1/01-6/30/09
Karen Popken	ex-officio trustee		Teacher, RVCS	2 yrs. served: 7/1/07-6/30/09
Julie Ryan	Co-Vice Chair; Co-Chair COT; Co-Chair Search	Exec., Committee on Trustees, Acct., Search	Communications, Marketing, Parent	2 terms; 4 yrs. served: 7/1/05-6/30/11
Linda Sewell	Co-Chair, Acct.	Accountability, Comm. on Trustees Grievance, Search	Finance, Operations, Parent	2 terms; 5 yrs. served: 7/1/04-6/30/10
Leslie Suggs	Chair, Memorandum of Understanding	Memorandum of Understanding	MSW, Non-Profit Administration, Parent	1 term; 3 yrs. served: 9/9/06-6/30/09
Bill Taylor	Co-Chair, Acct.; Chair, Grievance; Co-Chair, Search	Exec, Acct., Grievance, Search	Education, Parent	2 terms; 4 yrs. served: 7/1/05-6/30/11