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Massachusetts Center for
Charter Public School Excellence

2009 School Culture Survey

Charter schools were asked to participate in a survey in which they ranked and described factors important in developing and sustaining school culture. Twenty-three schools completed the survey and are listed on the below.

Overall Outcome

Based on a weighted average of those ranked top 3 in importance, schools selected the following drivers of school culture as their Top Selections:

- Adhering to core values and beliefs*
- Building a strong and supportive in-school community*
- Emphasizing academic excellence*

Participant Schools

- Academy of Strategic Learning
- Advanced Math and Science Academy
- Berkshire Arts & Technology
- Boston Collegiate
- Boston Day & Evening Academy
- Christa McAuliffe Regional
- City on a Hill
- Community Charter School of Cambridge
- Community Day
- Conservatory Lab
- Edward W. Brooke
- Foxborough Regional
- Global Learning
- Hill View Montessori
- Lowell Middlesex Academy
- Martha's Vineyard
- North Central
- Phoenix Charter Academy
- Roxbury Prep
- Seven Hills
- Silver Hills Horace Mann
- South Shore
- Sturgis

Summary Data

The following chart shows the complete rankings for the seven arenas surveyed, with each arena ranked in terms of importance ("1" being most important and "7" being the least important).

Culture Arena	Ranking						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Adhering to core values and beliefs	9	4	0	1	1	0	3
Building a strong and supportive in-school community	5	7	3	2	2	1	3
Emphasizing academic excellence	5	5	3	3	3	1	1
Holding celebrations with the broader school community	3	0	6	3	3	3	3
Conducting school-wide ceremonies and celebrations	2	1	3	2	4	4	2
Maintaining in-classroom routines & rituals	0	1	6	5	1	6	0
Holding cohort-specific smaller-scale events	0	4	0	2	5	3	6

Arena

Ranked first by:

- Adhering to core values and beliefs*
 - Berkshire Arts & Technology, Edward W. Brooke, Boston Day and Evening Academy (Beatriz Zapater), Global Learning, Sturgis, Lowell Middlesex Academy, City on a Hill, North Central, Boston Collegiate
- Building a strong and supportive in-school community*
 - Martha's Vineyard, Advanced Math and Science Academy, Conservatory Lab, Boston Day & Evening Academy (Karen Cowan), Hill View Montessori
- Emphasizing academic excellence*
 - Phoenix Charter Academy, Community Day, Silver Hill Horace Mann, South Shore, Community Charter School of Cambridge
- Holding celebrations with the broader school community*
 - Roxbury Prep, Foxborough Regional, Seven Hills
- Conducting school-wide ceremonies and celebrations*
 - Academy of Strategic Learning, Christa McAuliffe Regional

Specific Practices

2. Building a Strong & Supportive In-School Community

Academy of Strategic Learning

The creation of a cohesive supportive school environment precedes our efforts to focus on academic achievement. Numerous students have complex trauma in their lives that demand a continuous vigilance regarding caring and connection in our practices.

Community Day Charter Public School

We operate with close attention to students' specific needs; we have a LOT of meetings with parents and employ a school psychologist and other specialists to ensure that students are supported in the way they need. Lower school community groups focus on a different character trait each month and complete projects within and beyond the school as a way to explore those traits. The upper school community focuses on service-learning as a way to develop character and connect with the community.

Other practices include:

- After-school activities (e.g. violin, karate, art)
- Cross-grade projects (e.g. 8th graders teach 1st graders about specific Social Studies topics)
- Homework club for children who need assistance
- School traditions (e.g. annual school picnic, field trips, "dress down days")
- Student performances (e.g., music performances, plays)
- Students are recognized at school assemblies for being "model citizens" (e.g. helping others, being a team player)
- Teachers greet ALL students each morning as they arrive
- Volunteer mentors are paired with students who would benefit from additional attention (including gifted students); mentor-student activities range from reading a book together to extended carpentry and science projects.
- Year-long after-school sports program (most students participate in at least one sport)

Hill View Montessori Charter Public School

Practices include: student responsibility for classroom, student social groups and counselor support, spirit week, extracurricular sports, music, student council and cultural club

1. Adhering to Core Values and Beliefs

Global Learning Charter Public School

Our Board meetings are structured to include a presentation by staff to the Board about some key element of our Charter. In addition we have ten days of scheduled professional development in our calendar of which a component addresses core elements of our charter, especially regarding pedagogy. We have a committee system that practices our "shared leadership" philosophy and is a constant reminder that our Charter espouses consensus-based decision-making.

North Central Charter Essential School

We have a very strong mission statement that drives much of what we do. THINK, CARE, ACT are mantras here and our staff and students refer constantly to our mission and values, the NC 6: Safety, Responsibility, Integrity, Voice, Purpose and Community. We celebrate these through monthly community meetings, TCA awards, and in our advisory curriculum.

Boston Collegiate Charter School

The most important thing we can do is make sure every member of the team is on the same page when it comes to what we value and believe. We ensure this through orientation, interviewing of new staff, communications through leaders, emails to staff, feedback to teachers, and how we choose to spend our time as a staff. All of that then gets translated to students.

3. Emphasizing Academic Excellence

Phoenix Charter Academy

Practices include:

- Attendance: no excuses about attendance (85% were very truant or had dropped out before enrolling)
- Hiring high quality teachers with demonstrated experience to work very hard towards goals
- Students are held to culture standards like uniforms, being on time and attendance that put academics first
- Students are pushed by advisors to keep doing better - when they get up to a B average, we push for an A
- Students need a C- average or more to pass and receive credit
- Teachers are held accountable to learning goals and account ability plan goals for the school through the use of data

Community Charter School of Cambridge

We are absolutely clear about expectations for the classroom, for the kind and amount of work required, and about the behavior of students. We support faculty and staff to support students in meeting these expectations.

Berkshire Arts & Technology Charter Public School

Practices include:

- "BART Scholars" program that rewards highest achieving and highest "growing" student in each grade level with a (small) college scholarship that must be deposited in a qualified college savings account (we provide info sessions)
- Advisories are named after advisor's college
- All seniors have to pass a college course and be accepted to college to graduate
- Congratulatory signs for students when they achieve including each student's college acceptance
- Student portfolios are essential to our assessment process
- Student work exhibitions through Diploma Plus
- Students visit colleges as often as our budget allows for field trips

4. Holding Celebrations with the Broader School Community

Foxborough Regional Charter School

Practices Include:

- Develop senior week and term-3, spirit week activities, Graduation: Seniors work with administration to create the agenda for graduation, choosing all speakers, Mr. and Ms. FRCS pageant where teachers dress up and perform to choose staff representative for the next year, Senior vs. staff challenge
- Open houses (several) for parents and students; cross-curricular projects are highlighted in evening events that are well attended by parents
- 1st Grade Portfolio Night, Back to School Night, Coffee houses throughout the year where students come and perform for the school whether through writing, theater performances or musical performances, Director's Breakfast (monthly), High School Night, Honor roll breakfasts each term to celebrate those who have earned honor roll, Kindergarten Meet and Greet, Poetry Festival, Spanish Night, Welcome to 6th Grade Night
- School-wide Literacy month with challenges

Martha's Vineyard

Community is a value that is important in a K-12 school illustrated by the fact that we begin each day with a community meeting which lasts five minutes making special announcements, singing happy birthday, announcing the day's lunch, and singing a song once a week.

North Central Charter Essential School

Practices include:

- Call home system (all call) has recently been introduced to make announcements and let families know about what is going on in school.
- Monthly community meetings are led by students (mostly 11th and 12th graders) and are filled with celebration, appreciation and respect for our mission and values. These meetings are fun, engaging and reflect our school's Think Care Act mission.
- Public celebrations of full group and individual work in grade levels and subject area are held.
- Senior Project presentations are attended by 11th graders and this next year we plan to invite the whole school.
- Structured parent, teacher, and student meetings focused on students explaining their personal learning goals and exhibiting their progress towards those goals at the end of the year in Gate way (8-9th grade, 10-11th grade) and Roundtable. These meetings put the focus on individual student learning and accomplishments and bring parents into school 3 times per year.

7. Holding Cohort-Specific Smaller-Scale Events

Seven Hills Charter Public School

It is vital for the school to maintain a level of consistency in order to ensure smooth operations and a focus on learning. To that end, we utilize Harry Wong's on-line training course, along with PBIS protocols and basic learning environment training to help teachers establish efficient classroom and school-wide routines and procedures.

Boston Collegiate Charter School

Given our size and our facility, we cannot all gather as a school. Therefore, we spend much time in grades 5-8 ensuring that grade-level assemblies are culture-building. We have rituals and traditions that celebrate student achievement and reward behaviors that reflect the school's values.

5. Conducting School-Wide Ceremonies & Celebrations

Christa McAuliffe

We have several rituals at McAuliffe that are school-wide and celebrate success, which include:

- "Ecommunity Day" is when the entire school community is engaged in service projects together that help our community and our eco-system (planting flower beds, cleaning up hiking trails, picking up litter in downtown Framingham)
- "McAuliffest" is an annual exhibition night where students will present and talk about their work. All students present at the same time to visitors and guests. This is set up in an open house fashion, where guests move from student to student and complete a rubric to give feedback to individual students about the work they see
- Bi-weekly all school meetings with time to address relevant issues for our school community, each meeting begins with "kudos" that acknowledge accomplishments of groups and "star awards" are awarded to individual students who demonstrate one of our school's 10 design principles
- Field Day is a day of "collaboration and competition" (a design principle) where kids will compete with their crew (group) against other crews at various field day events
- Portfolio Project Presentation (more commonly known at McAuliffe as P3) is the rite of passage from one grade to the next, a celebration of learning where students prepare and present a reflection on their academic and personal growth throughout the year while making connections to our design principles.

6. Maintaining In-Classroom Routines & Rituals

Phoenix Charter Academy

Practices include:

- "Challenge levels", a differentiation process which includes different levels of work for students depending upon their ability
- Blackboard configuration standard in every classroom
- Checking in on rituals that work weekly in PD
- College question challenges included as part of the TTL
- Strict rules about classroom readiness

Berkshire Arts and Technology Charter Public School

Practices include:

- All classes are to follow the workshop model for instruction
- All classes are to have weekly formative assessments
- All classes begin with "entrance ticket"
- All classrooms are required to have agenda, objective, and homework posted

City on a Hill

Practices include:

- Every class begins with a do now and ends with a short assessment of what has been learned
- Merit/demerit system standardized across the school - Culture of "this classroom will not be disrupted."
- Standard blackboard configuration

Community Day Charter Public School

We use the standard BBC model so every class begins with a Do Now, then a preview of the day's lesson; every lesson is closed with a brief summary and is linked to homework that is specific to that lesson. In our Lower School, teachers all use the same behavior system, which includes tally marks for positive behavior that are given periodically throughout each lesson.