

“Why Should We Care?”

2021-2022 Essential Question



What is a Charter School?

Under the Massachusetts Education Reform Act of 1993, the state may grant groups of citizens the right (or “charter”) to start new public schools, which report to the state Office of Education and to their independent Boards of Trustees. By freeing these charter schools from the constraints of district supervision, it aims to nurture bold ideas and innovation in existing schools state-wide. Charter schools follow all federal and state regulations about non-discrimination; their admission is open to all.

The Parker School

A six-year public secondary school of choice, the Francis W. Parker Charter Essential School is open by lottery admissions to all residents of Massachusetts in grades seven through twelve.

Parker is a progressive school which emphasizes learning to use one’s mind well and putting the student at the center of the educational process. Students are known well at Parker. School climate is built on trust, decency, and democracy.

One of Massachusetts’ first charter schools, Parker was started in 1995 by area parents and teachers committed to the principles of the Coalition of Essential Schools. Nationally recognized progressive educators Ted and Nancy Sizer were among Parker’s founders and the school is part of their legacy; Ted and Nancy served as co-principals at Parker in 1998-1999.

The school was named after Francis W. Parker, the 19th-century New England educator who is known as the father of American progressive education.

The school includes the Theodore R. Sizer Teachers Center whose mission is to disseminate best educational practices to other schools and educators. Parker also houses the New

What is an Essential School?

Established in 1984 by Theodore R.Sizer at Brown University, the Coalition of Essential Schools is a national network of over 1,200 schools and Centers engaged in restructuring and redesigning schools to promote better student learning and achievement. Essential schools share a common set of ideas known as the Ten Common Principles, which call for schools to set clear and simple goals about the intellectual skills and knowledge to be mastered by all the school's students; to lower teacher-student loads, personalize teaching and curriculum, and make student work the center of classroom activity; to award diplomas based on students' "exhibition" of their mastery of the school's program; to create an atmosphere of trust and respect for the school, faculty, students and parents; and to model democratic practices and honor diversity.

QUICK FACTS

Established in 1995

Student Enrollment: 400
[The school's size is limited by its charter.]

Students come from 40 towns in north central MA

Grades: 7 - 12

Guided by The Coalition of Essential Schools 10 Common Principles

The 2021-2022 Essential Question is "Why Should We Care?"

Faculty and Staff: 72

Board of Trustees: 12

Offers teachers an educator program through the New Teachers Collaborative Program (NTC)

Teachers Collaborative, a site-based teacher preparation program designed to offer training and experience in small school design, progressive pedagogical practices, and team teaching.

The Parker Student Body

Parker enrolls 400 students from 40 towns in north central Massachusetts; the socioeconomic, ethnic, and educational characteristics of the student body closely reflect the general population of the region. Like all public schools, Parker serves students with a range of needs, abilities, and disabilities.

The Faculty

The Parker School has a talented and dedicated faculty. Parker teachers work together every summer to develop the school's curriculum and its unique program. All teachers serve as advisers to students, nurturing their intellectual, emotional, social, and ethical development. Parker gives top priority to keeping teaching loads at a level where every student can be known well. As faculty members at Parker commit to the development and achievement of their students, they also commit to one another's professional growth through critical conversation and daily collaboration. Parker trains, credentials, and supports early career teachers through the New Teachers Collaborative.

The Trustees

Parker School Trustees include parents, teachers, educators, alumni, and community members who share a commitment to Parker's mission.

As a public school, Parker is subject to the MA Open Meeting Laws. All of our Board of Trustees Meetings and Board Committee Meetings are open to the public.



Mission

The Parker School's mission is "to move the child to the center of the education process and to interrelate the several subjects of the curriculum in such a way as to enhance their meaning for the child" (Charter, October 1994). As a member of the Coalition of Essential Schools, the Parker School will realize this mission through educational practice guided by the Ten Common Principles of Essential Schools.



The Ten Common Principles

Learning to use one's mind well

The school should focus on helping young people learn to use their minds well. Schools should not be "comprehensive" if such a claim is made at the expense of the school's central intellectual purpose.



Less is more: depth over coverage

The school's goals should be simple: that each student master a limited number of essential skills and areas of knowledge. While these skills and areas will, to varying degrees, reflect the traditional academic disciplines, the program's design should be shaped by the intellectual and imaginative powers and competencies that the students need, rather than by "subjects" as conventionally defined. The aphorism "less is more" should dominate: curricular decisions should be guided by the aim of thorough student mastery and achievement rather than by an effort to merely cover content.

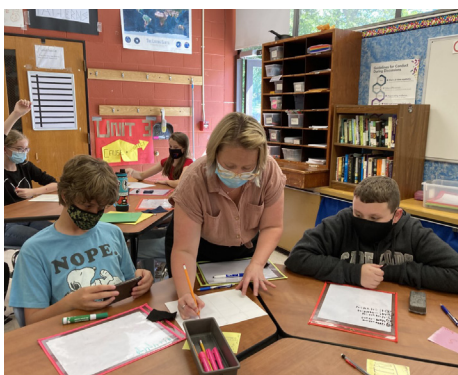


Goals apply to all students

The school's goals should apply to all students, while the means to these goals will vary as those students themselves vary. School practice should be tailor-made to meet the needs of every group or class of students.

Personalization

Teaching and learning should be personalized to the maximum feasible extent. Efforts should be directed toward a goal that no teacher have direct responsibility for more than 80 students in the high school and middle school and no more than 20 in the elementary school. To capitalize on this personalization, decisions about the details of the course of study, the use of students' and teachers' time and the choice of teaching materials and specific pedagogies must be unreservedly placed in the hands of the principal and staff.



Student-as-worker, teacher-as-coach

The governing practical metaphor of the school should be



“student-as-worker”, rather than the more familiar metaphor of “teacher as deliverer of instructional services.” Accordingly, a prominent pedagogy will be coaching students to learn how to learn and thus to teach themselves.

Demonstration of mastery

Teaching and learning should be documented and assessed with tools based on student performance of real tasks. Students not yet at appropriate levels of competence should be provided intensive support and resources to assist them quickly to meet standards. Multiple forms of evidence, ranging from ongoing observation of the learner to completion of specific projects, should be used to better understand the learner’s strengths and needs, and to plan for further assistance. Students should have opportunities to exhibit their expertise before family and community. The diploma should be awarded upon a successful final demonstration of mastery for graduation: an “Exhibition.” As the diploma is awarded when earned, the school’s program proceeds with no strict age grading and with no system of “credits earned” by “time spent” in class.

A tone of decency and trust

The tone of the school should explicitly and self-consciously stress values of unanxious expectation, of trust, and of decency (fairness, generosity, and tolerance). Incentives appropriate to the school’s particular students and teachers should be emphasized. Families should be key collaborators and vital members of the school community.

Commitment to the entire school

The principal and teachers should perceive themselves as generalists first (teachers and scholars in general education) and specialists second (experts in but one particular discipline). Staff should expect multiple obligations (teacher-counselor-manager) and demonstrate a sense of commitment to the entire school.

Resources dedicated to teaching and learning

Ultimate administrative and budget targets should include student loads that promote personalization, substantial time for collective planning by teachers, competitive salaries for staff, and an ultimate per-pupil cost not to exceed that at traditional schools by more than 10 percent. To accomplish this, administrative plans may have to show the phased reduction or elimination of some services now provided to students in many schools.

Democracy and equity

The school should demonstrate non-discriminatory and inclusive policies, practices, and pedagogies. It should model democratic practices that involve all who are directly affected by the school. The school should honor diversity and build on the strength of its communities, deliberately and explicitly challenging all forms of inequity.



Diversity, Equity and Inclusion at Parker

We believe that learning in community empowers hearts and minds and can lead to positive change in the world beyond school. Parker embraces the 10th Common Principle of Essential Schools—Democracy and Equity—and works to “...honor diversity and build on the strength of its communities, deliberately and explicitly challenging all forms of inequity...”

In our daily cultural practice we partner with students, staff, and families, striving to build school climate that is inclusive, just, and equitable; as an institution, we commit to ongoing learning, collaboration, and action in pursuit of a more just and equitable future for all.

Our commitments to democracy and equity are also reflected in our taught curriculum: we foster respect for individual persons, their perspectives, and their stories; we facilitate analytical engagement with a wide range of cultures, narratives, artifacts, and systems; as well, we support students and staff in examining, understanding, and embodying their unique identities.

Current work and observable practice related to these commitments include:

- Undertaking deliberate work to become an Anti-Racist institution;
- Providing ongoing professional development for staff in diversity, equity, and inclusion;
- Establishing a board-level subcommittee for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion;
- Creating a culture of belonging through Parker Alliance for Community Tolerance (PACT) and other agreements;
- Convening a range of well-attended LGBTQ+ student groups.



Essential Question

Parker's essential question this year is **"Why Should We Care?"** The school-wide essential question is chosen in the spring for the following year: the rising seniors propose two options and then staff and students make a choice by voting.

Parker teachers design the school's inquiry-based curriculum each year around the Essential Question, such as "What is community?" "What is change?" "What is balance?" "Where are the patterns?" "What really matters?" Student learning crosses disciplinary lines as the Essential Question generates sub-questions that invite active learning of both thinking skills and content-area knowledge through projects and other research.



Advisory

Philosophy and Purpose

The Advisory Program at Parker exists to enable advisors and students to know each other well so that students make the most of their experiences as members of the Parker community, a community guided by the 10 Common Principles of the Coalition of Essential Schools. The focus of advisory is on the development of the whole child, on building relationships, and on creating a safe, supportive and caring peer and school culture. The specific purposes of advisory are:

- **Academic Advising:** The advisory is a place to develop personal learning plans (PLPs), to monitor student progress in general and toward specific goals, to discuss teachers' assessments with students and parents, and to build upon the habits of learning.
- **Community Service:** The advisory is a place to practice being an active member of the broader community by designing and implementing community service projects.
- **Community Conversations:** The advisory is a place for school-wide conversations about community issues, including school governance, and about being a community member.
- **Recreation/Group Dynamics:** The advisory is a place to have fun and to learn about group process and dynamics.

Habits of Learning

These are the habits that the Parker community expects its students to develop and exhibit in their academic work and in daily life.

Inquiry	In both school work and daily life, you show intellectual curiosity and wonder about the world. You ask thoughtful questions, and seek out their answers.
Expression	In both school life and daily life, you communicate honestly what you know or want to know, and what you believe or feel.
Critical Thinking	In both school life and daily life, you analyze, synthesize, and draw conclusions from information. You generate solutions to problems using both creative and rational thought. You keep an open mind and appreciate different points of view.
Collaboration	In both school life and daily life, you contribute to the overall effort of a group. You work well with diverse individuals and in a variety of situations, using effective communication skills (consulting, listening, speaking).
Organization	In both school life and daily life, you sift through ideas and data, arranging them wisely and making sense of them. You come to school prepared with what you will need. You set reasonable goals, then plan and manage your time so as to meet them.
Attentiveness	In both school life and daily life, you focus on the task at hand, observing and taking in the information you need to do it well.
Involvement	Both in school and in the larger community, you take the initiative to participate in the process of learning. You contribute questions, ideas, and actions in group discussions, activities, and projects.
Reflection	In both school life and daily life, you review and think about your actions and the work you produce, with the purpose of learning more.
Perseverance	In both school life and daily life, you self-start and stick with a task to its completion. When you encounter setbacks or obstacles, you try again. You seek out and use resources and assistance to make progress.

Academic Program

Parker's unique program draws directly from the mission of the school and serves to support and reinforce the school's positive culture. The academic program is divided into four Domains:



Arts & Humanities (AH) is an integrated study of literature, history, social sciences, and visual and performing arts that focuses on the skills of Writing, Reading, Research, Oral Presentation, Artistic Expression, and Listening.

Math, Science and Technology (MST) is an integrated study of math, science and technology that focuses on the skills of Mathematical Problem-Solving, Mathematical Communication, Scientific Investigation, Systems Thinking and Technology.

Spanish is the sole language offered by the school, and virtually all students study the language. It focuses on the skill areas of

Interpersonal Communication, Presentational Communication, and Interpretive Communication.

Wellness is an integrated study of physical activity, health, and personal and social responsibility.

There are three Divisions within the school that span each of the academic Domains and include students of mixed ages. The curriculum rotates on a two-year cycle within each Domain at each Division level with variations in Division Three. “Promotion” at Parker demands that students exhibit readiness to move from one Division into the next in a particular academic Domain. Students work to meet standards in specified skill areas. Each skill area has corresponding Criteria for Excellence that clearly articulate the expectations for that skill. Rubrics devised from the school-wide Criteria for Excellence serve as the basis for assessment of all student work.



Assessments at Parker

At Parker, all major projects (known as “assessments” or “portfolio pieces” in the Parker lingo) are graded, or assessed, on a continuum that reflect student progress towards the goal of meeting standards.

We use the language of “Beginning”, “Approaches”, and “Meets” to communicate where the student is on the continuum. Our belief is that all students can and will meet standards through continued effort, practice, and utilization of teacher feedback. At the beginning of their journey in a Division, students gradually improve their skills through class work, daily homework and projects and through internalizing and applying the teacher feedback they receive.

When we assess student work, the “grade” or assessment is an opportunity to convey to students where they are on their journey towards Meets. Through written feedback (rubrics, progress reports, etc.), student work earns an assessment on this continuum.

Most students take about two years to consistently meet standards in any domain. When they are consistently meeting standards in each skill area, they are ready to gateway to the next division.

Gateways: Promotion by Portfolio

Student work is assessed at Parker via portfolios, using school-wide standards and rubrics. To advance through its six-year program of studies, students are required to meet the school’s standards for Divisions I, II, and III (divisions roughly equate to traditional grade levels); each may do so at the rate appropriate for his or her individual development. Students demonstrate mastery of curricular standards in each Division through “Gateway Exhibitions” in which they present and



Essential Question, "How can I create eco-friendly jewelry that raises environmental awareness?"



defend their academic portfolios. The final Gateway is graduation, and students final exhibition is linked to the Senior Project.

Senior Projects

Division III students at Parker culminate their studies with a capstone Senior Project, a topic or project they choose to explore independently with the guidance of an outside mentor. Presented to a public audience as part of a student's Senior Project Exhibition, the Senior Project makes an intellectual and personal bridge between high school and the world beyond.

During this project they must:

- Generate an "essential question";
- Explore this question by:
- Engaging in formal academic research;
- Collaborating with people outside the Parker School (e.g. internship, interview series, job-shadowing, field research);
- Apply skills and knowledge from several disciplines to complete the project;
- Present their project to a panel.

Service to the Community

Students in all Parker Divisions serve on vitally important school operations committees (including an elected Community Congress and a student Justice Committee) and live by a Parker School Constitution which the student body wrote and approved. They offer their services to the school community in many other ways, from peer tutoring to hosting outside visitors to maintaining the school's computer systems. In addition, advisory groups and elective classes go into the surrounding communities to work with nursing homes, shelters, and other service organizations.

All Division III students commit two hours per week to in-school service. In addition, adults involved in daily functioning in the Parker school serve as mentors to one or two Division III students. Some students may work with the Technology Coordinator on computer maintenance, others may work with Division I teachers as classroom aides/tutors, or as school ambassadors in the Sizer Teachers Center.

Student Government

Community Congress

The Community Congress (CC) serves as the legislative branch of the Parker School student government. It is made up of eighteen elected representatives, with each Division electing six representatives at the beginning of the school year, and representatives serving for

the school year. This group meets on a weekly basis to discuss and vote on proposals sent to it by anyone in the Parker community. Proposals are made by filling out a proposal sheet and submitting it to the Moderators or any CC member. Proposals need majority approval to pass. The CC is facilitated by the Moderators (see below) and follows modified Roberts Rules of Order to conduct its meetings. The majority of the policies and norms that make up the Parker Community Handbook have been created by the CC.

Justice Committee

The Justice Committee's (JC) function is to serve as the judicial branch of the Parker Government. The JC is made up of students and teachers. Students may sign up for JC, which meets on a weekly basis. The JC's job is to maintain a tone of trust and decency in the school, enforce norms and rules, and interpret the gray areas of the constitution and the school's norms. All JC proceedings are confidential.

Sizer Teachers Center

Parker shares what's been learned over twenty years of Essential School-keeping with others. The Sizer Teachers Center, located at Parker, provides workshops, custom visits, school coaching, and consulting services to educators, schools, and districts. The theory behind the work of the Sizer Teachers Center is that schools involved in reform—whether existing or new schools—benefit most from professional development that is carried out by people engaged in and committed to the same type of work. We believe that our teachers, who are themselves practitioners committed to helping students be successful in school, can effectively provide partnership and facilitation to people in other schools involved in the challenging and sometimes complicated process of change.

New Teachers Collaborative

New Teachers Collaborative is a MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) approved three-semester apprenticeship model of teacher preparation through which teachers learn how to teach by teaching. DESE defines the NTC Collaborating Teacher ("candidate") as both apprentice teacher and teacher of record. Candidates learn about teaching and learning as members of a cohort through which the habits and dispositions of reflective and collaborative practice are developed. Candidates participate in an ESE-approved program of study that involves three semesters of seminars in teaching and learning, a 3-credit course in supporting English Language Learners that leads to SEI endorsement, and a full-year teaching practicum.

Enrollment Overview

As a public school, The Francis W. Parker Charter Essential School complies with all state and federal regulations on safety and non-discrimination. The school's size is limited by its charter. The Parker School does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, creed or religion, sex, gender identity, ethnicity, sexual orientation, mental or physical disability, age, ancestry, athletic performance, special need, proficiency in the English language or a foreign language, or prior academic achievement.

Parker serves approximately 400 students in grades 7 through 12. Each school year, Parker determines the number of spaces available in each grade. In general, Parker expects to enroll approximately 65 new students entering 7th grade. Parker also accepts applications for students entering 8th and 9th grade and fills available seats in those grades based on attrition. Though Parker's attrition rate is quite low, if and when a seat becomes available in the 7th, 8th or 9th grades, new students are admitted from the waitlist (defined by the state as "backfilling") for those grades,



as established through the lottery that happens in early February each year. Parker does not accept new students into grades ten, eleven, and twelve and therefore does not accept applications for those grades.

As a public school, there is no cost to apply to or enroll at The Parker School, and there are no admission requirements beyond completing and submitting an application by the February 1st deadline.

Students and Parents

Athletics Mission Statement

Parker's athletic program is, most importantly, where students learn the value of good health, collaboration, fun, and building relationships. The athletic program provides opportunities for instruction, participation, and growth and strives to promote healthy competition characterized by sportsmanship and teamwork. Athletics at Parker enhances the academic experience and, while fostering respectful relationships among the students, strengthens the community. Students are encouraged to strive to compete at the highest level their ability and performance will allow. Accordingly, Parker provides varied levels of competition for each athlete. These goals of the athletic program relate to the following common principles of the Coalition of Essential Schools: requiring students to demonstrate mastery through exhibition, personalizing teaching and learning, emphasizing depth over breadth, embracing the metaphor "student as worker, teacher as coach," stressing un-anxious expectation, trust and decency, considering teachers as generalists with a commitment to the entire school, and modeling democratic and equitable practices.

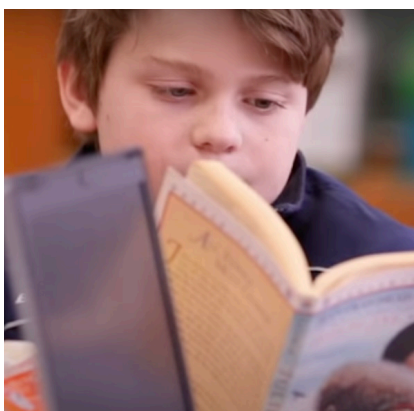


Cafeteria: Meal Information

The USDA, through the extension of a summer meals program, announced approval of a waiver that makes all students eligible for free meals. Meals will be available for all students ages 0-21 at no cost through the 2021-2022 school year or until it is no longer fiscally or legally possible.

Library

In addition to Parker's physical library, the school uses the collection of titles in Sora, which is an app with 24/7 access to e-books and audiobooks. It's convenient for students to check out titles at home with no worry about misplacing a book or returning it late.



Sora can help students of all ages read more and improve comprehension. Struggling or reluctant readers, learning-challenged, second language learners, and gifted readers can all benefit from this service.

School Counselor

The School Counselor serves as a liaison between home and school, particularly in situations where personal or family issues may be affecting a student's academic or behavioral performance.

Health Office Mission Statement

The school nurse will foster academic achievement of all students by promoting health, wellness, and school attendance. This will be achieved using nursing assessment, interventions, health promotion in a safe, caring, and supportive environment as well as collaboration with families and the educational team.

College and Transition Counseling

Our objective is to help students determine which opportunities, academic programs, or colleges are right for them while minimizing uncertainty by providing resources and information throughout the process.

Making a successful selection requires thoughtful insight into matching the interests, abilities, needs, and goals of the student with the characteristics of each college or transition choice.

The Office of College and Transition Counseling can help students and their families with determining post-graduation options, preparing for the college application and admission process, understanding financial aid and loan options, and making enrollment decisions.



The Sizer Foundation

The Sizer Foundation is a public charity whose sole purpose is to support Parker. Here are some of the ways it does so:

- The Sizer Foundation owns the school's campus at 49 Antietam Street;
- The Sizer Foundation is a not-for-profit corporation (501c3), so gifts to the foundation are tax deductible for individual donors;
- The Sizer Foundation seeks grant funding to support all Parker programs — the charter public school, the Sizer Teachers Center, and the New Teachers Collaborative.

The Sizer Foundation, Inc works with organizations, corporations, foundations and state and federal agencies in support of the Francis W. Parker Charter Essential School, the Theodore R. Sizer Foundation and the New Teachers Collaborative.



Future Leadership Opportunity

Parker Charter Essential School seeks a genuine leader who will honor its roots while embracing opportunities for growth and who can lead the organization through its next phase of strategic development. The next leader of Parker will find a grade 7-12 public school that is highly collaborative, student-centered, and a model of progressive education. Firmly rooted in the work of Ted and Nancy Sizer, the school is mission driven, with a faculty that is democratic, dedicated, and masterful at interrelating academic subjects and skills. The school embraces systems and structures that ensure fidelity to a progressive model, including performance-based promotion standards, restorative justice, and a strong, tight-knit sense of community; a tone of trust and decency defines the school culture. At Parker, students are accepted for who they are and supported in setting and achieving meaningful goals, and the community functions well with few rules and high expectations. Each year the lottery is full and the school maintains a healthy waitlist. The welcoming nature of the school attracts a wide variety of students and families who appreciate the deliberate structures that allow students to be known well. Facilities are functional; the campus is rural and attractive. An intentionally flat organization, the administrative team is small and high-functioning. As a public charter school, Parker looks forward to its next leader securing resources to supplement those received from sending districts to enable the school to more fully realize and fund its mission as the school enters its fourth decade. All in all, this is an opportunity to lead and to promote a charter essential school that is a model of what education should be.

Skills and personal traits desired in the next leader:

1. An emotionally-intelligent communicator and thought leader who moves fluidly between conversations with multiple constituencies and is excited to talk about the school's mission and programs with new and known audiences.
2. A skilled facilitator who builds community and democratic voice while trusting the faculty and admin team to do their best work for the students and the school.
3. A culturally competent leader who will extend the school's culture of belonging and guide on-going advancement relative to diversity, equity, and inclusion.
4. A financially savvy administrator with business acumen and capability to manage state and charter school regulations with an eye for prioritizing strategic opportunities to enrich the program.
5. A teacher-at-heart who can leverage a deep appreciation of the progressive school model to showcase the school across sectors on a local, state and national level.
6. A highly competent and confident steward who models dedication to continuous improvement and growth for all.
7. A creative educator who can support programs of internal and external teacher training and professional development that are integral to the school's design.



Application Process

Interested candidates should submit the following documents in a single merged pdf to Mary Seppala or Doug Jennings, Consultants, Educators' Collaborative.

- EC Candidate Summary (request from Doug Jennings or Mary Seppala)
- Letter of interest to the Parker Charter Essential School Search Committee
- Current resume
- Statement of leadership philosophy
- List of five references with e-mail addresses and telephone contact.

Contact Information:

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