



NORTHERN LIGHTS
COMMUNITY SCHOOL



NORTHERN LIGHTS COMMUNITY SCHOOL

PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL DISTRICT #4146

SCHOOL YEAR 2016-2017
WORLD'S BEST WORKFORCE & ANNUAL REPORT

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Cover Photo: The Northern Lights Community School band participated in the 44th Annual Head of the Lakes Jazz Festival March 17-18, 2017, at the University of Minnesota Duluth.

1. School Information

CONTACT INFORMATION

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GRADES SERVED

6-12

YEAR OPENED

2005

MISSION AND VISION

NLCS seeks to create a safe, small, and enthusiastic learning community in which all students are known well, taught as individuals, and encouraged to be good stewards of our environment.

- Every student will be treated as a unique individual and will have a personalized learning plan.
- Every student will be ensured a safe, family-oriented learning environment that focuses on continual growth.
- Every student will learn to be an environmental steward and service-oriented citizen.
- Every student will acquire essential life skills to ensure success in the 21st Century.
- Every student will learn through authentic hands-on projects.
- Every student will have autonomy over her or his education as s/he drives toward mastery.

AUTHORIZER INFORMATION

Northern Lights Community School has been authorized by the Audubon Center of the North Woods (ACNW) since summer 2011. The current contract runs through the 2019-2020 school year.

The authorizing mission of ACNW is to ensure quality academic and environmental literacy outcomes for students in Minnesota by conducting effective oversight and evaluation of its authorized schools, providing strategic support to schools, and making informed and merit-based decisions about its portfolio of charter schools.

The authorizing vision of ACNW is to authorize a portfolio of high performing charter schools that instill a connection and commitment to the environment in their school communities, while working towards a healthy planet where all people live in balance with the Earth.

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2. Implementation of Primary and Additional Statutory Purposes

Northern Lights Community School was established under pre-2013 charter school legislation to address each of the existing statutory purposes. The statutory purposes and NLCS's efforts to fulfill them are listed below.

1. *Improve pupil learning and student achievement.*

The staff at Northern Lights Community School strives to base curricular and academic decisions on a true and complete understanding of each student's learning. When students enter the school, efforts are made to understand their background knowledge and current skill levels, and then group placements and expectation levels are established to promote achievement. While NLCS students, as an aggregate, tend to perform below grade level on standardized tests of math and reading skills, most show annual academic growth. Students are also evaluated through a variety of rubrics and checklists that indicate mastery of topics such as environmental learning, use of technology, and acquisition of life skills.

2. *Increase learning opportunities for pupils.*

Northern Lights Community School is the only project-based school in Itasca County. As a school of choice, it often attracts students who are interested in a hands-on approach to learning as well as students who are dissatisfied with traditional school approaches. Nearby school districts sponsor a small number of alternative programs, but NLCS continues to be the only local alternative that does not require administrative-backed placements. Alternatives within traditional school districts do not allow students to simply opt in.

3. *Encourage the use of different and innovative teaching methods.*

Learning at Northern Lights Community School is student-centered rather than teacher-centered. With completion of authentic projects as the primary way in which students earn credit, teachers are facilitators rather than lecturers. They consider each student's needs and abilities, help students plan and design projects, coach and encourage, and oversee the quality of work. Students, in turn, must become active participants in creating their own learning.

4. *Measure learning outcomes and create different and innovative forms of measuring outcomes.*

All Northern Lights Community School students have portfolios that demonstrate rationale for progress toward graduation. Portfolios create a means for both students and teachers to evaluate progress and reflect on the quality of work. Portfolios also allow students to document work such as service learning or environmental projects that are not measured well with traditional tests and they allow students who are not good test takers to demonstrate mastery of subject matter.

NLCS staff members have also designed a variety of rubrics and checklists that help track students' progress in areas including projects, portfolios, essential life skills, technology proficiency, and environmental literacy.

5. *Establish new forms of accountability for schools.*

In addition to following the academic progress of students, Northern Lights Community School has used the Hope Survey for the past 11 years to assess the school environment from the perspective of students. Online surveys ask students a variety of questions related

to autonomy, belongingness, goal orientation, academic press, engagement, and hope. According to Hope literature, the survey diagnoses whether a school culture has the components that encourage higher levels of engagement in learning. The staff uses results from the previous year's surveys as a basis for setting goals to address specific Hope components.

NLCS also measures satisfaction of both students and parents through annual surveys distributed and collected during the school year. Survey results are discussed among staff and board members and included in annual reports.

6. Create new professional opportunities for teachers including the chance to be responsible for the learning program at the school.

Staff members share responsibility for operation of the school with the director. They meet frequently to coordinate plans and exchange information, and they often mentor one another. Currently, teachers maintain a majority on the school's seven-member board of directors. As board members, they deal not only with the learning program but also with state and federal mandates, finance, and creating policies for the school.

NLCS also has a successful instructional leadership team that is responsible for ensuring student learning. The leadership team meets bi-weekly to address specific needs of the academic program, and it works to hold the program accountable for reaching learning goals. During the 2016-2017 school year, the team included the school director, seven staff members, and a parent. In addition, one teacher served alongside the school director, business manager, and financial advisor on a school finance team.

Teachers at NLCS are required to have a professional learning plan (PLP) that contains at least four goals, two of which address the areas of math and reading. Each teacher is evaluated twice per year based on student performance, lesson observation, and progress on the PLP. Teachers also maintain teaching portfolios. In addition, NLCS promotes a variety of professional development opportunities throughout the school year based on needs established through teacher surveys, student data, and the director's needs assessment. Teachers and staff members have opportunities to play lead roles in developing trainings and workshops.

3. Student Enrollment & Demographics

STUDENT ENROLLMENT

Northern Lights Community School has an enrollment cap of 105 students — a number deliberately kept low to facilitate the school's mission. Students typically come from several local school districts including Grand Rapids, Deer River, Hibbing, Hill City, Greenway, and Nashwauk/Keewatin. At the beginning of the 2016-2017 school year, there were 105 students enrolled. There was a small waiting list the entire year.

Numbers used in the chart below are taken from the October 1 student count. Total ADM is calculated at the end of the school year.

Number of Students Enrolled	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18 (est.)
6th Grade	5	6	10
7th Grade	3	10	7
8th Grade	16	9	10

9th Grade	13	20	16
10th Grade	20	17	17
11th Grade	21	24	17
12th Grade	24	19	26
Total	102	105	103
Total ADM (Average Daily Membership) for year	103.57	102.24	102+

STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

In part because NLCS is a school of choice, some student demographic information differs significantly from other local schools. Special populations information reported by the Minnesota Department of Education for the 2016-2017 school year indicates that 52 percent of NLCS students were eligible for special education services, and 67 percent were eligible for free or reduced price meals. Nearly two percent of students were considered homeless. These numbers are considerably higher than those for students in the Grand Rapids School District, the home district for most NLCS students. Grand Rapids reported that 17 percent of students (K-12) were eligible for special education services; 40 percent were eligible for free or reduced price meals; and the homeless student population was 0.2 percent.

Because 16 percent of the student population self-identified as American Indian in 2016-17, NLCS qualified for state and federal funding to implement Indian education programming. An Indian education committee met regularly to review the NLCS program and its benefits to American Indian students.

As in other northern Minnesota schools, however, the NLCS student population tends to be primarily white, and the school has never had an opportunity to serve a student who is not proficient in English.

Demographic Trends	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18 (est.)
Total Enrollment	127	136	130
Male	56%	50.4%	49%
Female	44%	49.5%	51%
Special Education	56%	52%	39%
English Learners	0	0	0
Free/Reduced Priced Lunch	78.8%	67%	68.3%
Black, not of Hispanic Origin	4%	5%	4%
Hispanic/Latino	2%	4%	3%
Asian/Pacific Islander	1%	0	0
American Indian/Alaskan Native	22%	16%	9%
White, not of Hispanic Origin	71%	75%	84%

4. Student Attendance, Attrition & Mobility

STUDENT ATTENDANCE

Attendance rates throughout the school year are typically very high – in the mid to upper 90% range. We believe that our high attendance rate is a point of pride and is proof that our students enjoy coming to school and want to be here. By the end of the year, the overall student attendance rate tends to settle right about 90% after the typical cold and flu season is over and seniors are out

of the building more often as they finish their credits early and are not required to be in class anymore.

	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17
Overall Student Attendance Rate	85.1%	88.8%	89.9%

STUDENT ATTRITION

Northern Lights Community School enrolls students at any time throughout the school year as needed to maintain a total of 105 enrollment. We typically see more movement in and out of our school at the high school level (grades 10 through 12). The younger students (grades 6 through 9) tend to stay put once they enroll. Our high school students come and go due to a variety of reasons including family moving, health problems, job requirements, and credit deficiency. We are not a credit recovery school and students who fall behind sometimes seek out an Area Learning Center or night school program to make up credits.

Percentage of students* who continued enrollment in the school from Spring 2016 to October 1, 2016.	84%
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**Graduating students not included*

Percentage of students* who were continuously enrolled between October 1 of the 2015-2016 school year and October 1 of the 2016-17 school year.	65%
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**Graduating students not included*

STUDENT MOBILITY

The last several years have been building years as Northern Lights Community School ramped up to full capacity. As you can see by the charts below, there were some growing pains as programmatic changes were made under the previous director's tenure. Although some students and families expressed their dissatisfaction at the changes by seeking out other schools to attend (as can be seen in the 2014-15 statistics), the following years saw tremendous growth in enrollment that ultimately allowed NLCS to reach its peak capacity of 105 and remain there. The official 2016-17 statistics were unavailable at the time of this report, but have been estimated below.

	Summer Transfers In	Number of students on Oct. 1	Mid-year Transfers In	Mid-year Transfers Out	Total Mid-year Transfers	Mobility Index* (as a percent)
2013-14	23	92	30	33	63	68%
2014-15	14	88	30	49	79	90%
2015-16	32	104	20	37	57	55%
2016-17**	26	106	26	26	52	49%

* Total mid-year transfers divided by number of students on October 1.

** All numbers are estimated and will not be finalized with MDE until after this report is made.

As was stated above, NLCS sees more movement in and out of our program at the high school level.

80% of our population is enrolled in grades 9-12. Any movement in that cohort affects long-term enrollment with us on a larger scale as shown below.

Percentage of students who were enrolled for 95% or more of the 2016-17 school year.	61%
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5. Educational Approach & Curriculum

As charged in its mission statement, Northern Lights Community School provides a small and accepting learning community in which students are treated as unique individuals — each with tremendous talent. Every student has a personal learning plan (PLP), and assessments are used to measure progress toward goals. Students’ voices and their interests are at the center of all educational decisions.

The core of NLCS’s educational approach is authentic learning — work that encourages students to create meaningful and useful products they may share. As described by Audrey Rule in the *Journal of Authentic Learning* (August 2006), the approach has four themes:

1. Performing activities that involve real-world problems and mimic the work of professionals including presenting findings to audiences beyond the classroom;
2. Use of open-ended inquiry, thinking skills and metacognition;
3. Engaging students in written or spoken communication and social learning; and
4. Encouraging students to direct their own learning through project work

NLCS board and staff members believe that students who feel personally connected to what they are learning will be both motivated and empowered to complete high school and move on to work or additional education.

Middle level learners (grades 6–8) focus on goals for reading, math, and essential life skills. They also complete authentic learning projects based on their interests, and they document their work in portfolios. In addition, high school students (grades 9–12) include goals that ensure career and/or college readiness, and they are required to include at least one authentic community-based project in their portfolios.

Students are assigned to an advisory group — the middle school group for students in grades 6-8 or one of four advisories for high school students. All advisories have mixed ages of students, and students in the high school program stay in the same group throughout their high school career. A licensed teacher leads each advisory, and each also has a permanent project manager (paraprofessional) available on a daily basis to work with students individually or in small groups. The advisory system supports the school’s effort to ensure that each student is known well.

NLCS offers an extensive array of special services to meet the needs of its students. Five staff members hold certifications in special education, another is licensed in adaptive physical education, several project managers assist special education students within advisory groups, and a licensed teacher oversees the Title I program. The school implements an inclusive special education model. All students with disabilities are provided special instruction and services within the least restrictive setting with a focus on providing support within the advisory classroom. Appropriate plans to meet the special education needs, goals and objectives of a pupil are determined on an individual basis by a team that includes teachers, parents, and the student; and students who

require high levels of assistance are provided with one-to-one paraprofessionals to ensure access to the general education curriculum throughout the entire day.

6. Innovative Practices & Implementation

Like all charter schools within the state of Minnesota, NLCS aims to improve pupil learning and achievement. NLCS also offers increased learning opportunities for students in the local area who have not been successful in other schools. Staff members use a variety of measures to track student progress during the school year, and they seek ways to help each student improve skills. Constant communication is valued. When a student is not making adequate progress toward earning credits, advisors meet with the student and his or her parents to identify solutions.

A variety of effective practices come together to support the students and staff at Northern Lights Community School. Some of the most apparent are project-based learning, personalized learning, and emphasis on the environment across the curriculum.

Project-based learning is the natural vehicle to carry the kind of authentic learning described in the *Educational Approach & Curriculum* section. Projects incorporate a variety of subject areas and reflect the interests of the students who design and complete them. Students have opportunities to write and talk about their projects. Presentation nights are held during the school year, and projects are represented in students' portfolios. During 2013-2014, staff members recognized a need to help students learn how to build better projects, align projects to key learning targets, and increase academic proficiency. As a result, the following school years included a number of advisor-led projects. Advisors work together within their professional learning community to share ideas and develop projects.

Maintaining a small school helps ensure that no students are lost in a crowd, and the advisory system described earlier creates opportunities for good relationship building between adults and students. When teachers and mentors establish supportive, non-threatening relationships with students, they come to know students' talents, backgrounds, self-concepts, aspirations, strengths and priorities. Staff members at NLCS personalize learning by using what they know about students to create challenging and interest-grabbing lessons and projects.

Study of the environment supports both the project-based and personalized learning emphases at NLCS. The following list, adapted from a November 2013 article in Project Learning Tree's *BLOG*, cites advantages of environmental education (EE).

- Environmental education is hands-on and interactive.
- It offers opportunities to work outside the classroom and to see how social, ecological, economic, cultural, and political issues interact.
- It encourages students to do research and use critical thinking skills.
- EE offers opportunities to incorporate state learning standards.
- It helps students develop a sense of place — an appreciation for the area in which they live.
- And it allows students to see the effects of their own actions.

After-school activities for students include cross-country running, archery, and track and field teams for both boys and girls. NLCS teams compete with teams from other regional schools and are supported with general education funds along with some fund-raising. Licensed coaches supervise teams, and NLCS maintains a membership in the Minnesota State High School League.

Additional clubs and activities operated within the school include the following:

- The YES! Club is an environmental club funded with grants and general education funds. A licensed science teacher advises the group.
- Journey is a Native American club supervised by staff members. The club promotes understanding and appreciation of Native American cultural practices and traditions.
- Chain Reaction is a student club with a mission to spread kindness. The club puts on events, recognizes students, and creates a culture of kindness at NLCS.
- The NLCS GSA club exists to bring together and recognize lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender, and straight youth in a positive and non-judgmental environment where they can fully express their individuality and share experiences. Their intent is to create alliances that increase awareness, decrease prejudices, and create a safe school atmosphere for all.
- The NLCS student government consists of students elected by their peers to serve as school leaders. Student council representatives help to make school decisions, discuss improvement initiatives, solve student issues, and award grants to students. Two licensed teachers supervise student council.
- Students also worked together to raise money for several trips. Fundraisers included a variety of endeavors including a haunted house, a mystery dinner theater, food sales, a pancake feed, a rock-a-thon, bingo games and more.

Within the environment of a project-based school, a fundraiser such as the annual haunted house involves students in writing, creating props, calculating budgets, and performing. The project helps them earn credits in language arts, drama, technology, service learning, and math.

During summer 2017, students also participated in four community outreach events: hosting an environmental booth at the Tall Timber Days celebration in Grand Rapids and National Night Out, marching in the Tall Timber Days parade, and providing information at NLCS's booth at the Itasca County Fair. The environmental booth included information on tree frogs, tadpoles, frogs, toads and natural and invasive species of crayfish.

7. Academic Performance: Goals & Benchmarks

PROGRESS ON ACNW CONTRACTUAL ACADEMIC GOALS & WBWF ALIGNMENT

The World's Best Workforce Bill was passed by the Minnesota legislature in 2013 to ensure that every school district in Minnesota is working to increase student performance. At the middle and high school levels the legislation promotes three goals.

1. All racial and economic achievement gaps between students are closed.
2. All students are ready for career and college.
3. All students graduate from high school.

In addition to the World's Best Workforce benchmarks, several academic and non-academic goals have been established as part of Northern Lights Community School's contract with the Audubon Center of the North Woods. Each of the goals identifies targets for instruction and student achievement.

The goals and measures established in cooperation with the Audubon Center of the North Woods are coded to correspond to World's Best Workforce goals in the following ways:

- Achievement Gap Closure (AGC)
- Career and College Ready (CCR)
- Graduate from High School (GRAD)

Several measures were used during the 2016-2017 school year to determine students' progress: Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) tests, Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (MCAs), school-developed rubrics, attendance and community service logs, and the Hope Survey.

World's Best Workforce (WBWF) Goal Areas:

- **Achievement Gap Closure [AGC]:** All racial and economic achievement gaps between students are closed.
- **Career and College Ready [CCR]:** All students are career- and college-ready before graduating from high school.
- **Graduate from High School [GRAD]:** All students graduate from high school.

Indicator 1: Mission Related Outcomes

Goal: 1A – Annually, 80% of continuously enrolled NLCS students will positively participate as active members of their community as measured by each student volunteering 25 hours of community service per year.

1B – Annually, students will demonstrate growth in their perceptions of belongingness and academic press as measured by the Hope Survey.

WBWF Goal Areas Addressed by this Goal: AGC, CCR, GRAD

Key Measures & Results for this Goal: 1A – According to advisor records, NLCS students exceeded this part of the goal – 100% of continuously enrolled students completed at least 25 hours of community service.

1B – According to the results of the Hope Survey, growth was seen in most categories (including belongingness and academic press) between fall of 2016 and spring of 2017. NLCS met this part of the goal for the 2016-17 school year.

Indicator 2: English Language Learners

Goal: The academic success of all Northern Lights Community School students, including English language learners, is a responsibility shared by teachers, staff members, families and the community at large. NLCS does not currently have ELL students enrolled, but guidelines are in place that will hold potential ELL students to the same high learning expectations established for all students.

Like every other student who attends NLCS, an ELL student would have a personalized learning plan. During the initial intake process, the staff would work with the family and student needing ELL services to create a support plan to ensure that individual needs would be met. English learners would be evaluated with appropriate and valid assessments that are aligned to state and local standards and that take into account the language development stages and cultural backgrounds of the individual.

WBWF Goal Areas Addressed by this Goal: AGC, CCR, GRAD

Key Measures & Results for this Goal: NLCS has never had an identified ELL student and therefore has no data to report for this goal. An ELL Plan of Service was written for the 2017-18 school year and will be reported in next year's annual report.

Indicator 3: Reading Growth

Goal: Annually, of the students continuously enrolled and who took the fall NWEA tests, 60% will meet their expected growth rate in the area of reading as measured by the winter or spring NWEA reading test.

WBWF Goal Areas Addressed by this Goal: AGC, GRAD

Key Measures & Results for this Goal: According to NWEA reporting, 71% of students who took the NWEA reading test showed growth from fall to spring during the 2016-17 school year. NLCS exceeded this goal.

Indicator 4: Math Growth

Goal: Annually, of the students continuously enrolled and who took the fall NWEA tests, 60% will meet their expected growth rate in the area of math as measured by the winter or spring NWEA math test.

WBWF Goal Areas Addressed by this Goal: AGC, GRAD

Key Measures & Results for this Goal: According to NWEA reporting, 74% of students who took the NWEA math test showed growth from fall to spring during the 2016-17 school year. NLCS exceeded this goal.

Indicator 5: Reading Proficiency

Goal: Annually, of the students who were continuously enrolled, 36% will be proficient in reading as measured by the MCA reading test.

WBWF Goal Areas Addressed by this Goal: AGC, CCR

Key Measures & Results for this Goal: According to MDE reported MCA scores for reading, 36.8% of NLCS students met or exceeded proficiency on the spring 2017 test. NLCS met this goal.

Indicator 6: Math Proficiency

Goal: During each of the contract years, the percentage of all tested students, enrolled by Oct. 1, will increase by 5%.

WBWF Goal Areas Addressed by this Goal: AGC, CCR

Key Measures & Results for this Goal: According to MDE reported MCA scores for math, 11.3% of NLCS students met or exceeded proficiency on the spring 2017 test. This is 2.7% less than the year before. NLCS did not meet this goal.

Indicator 7: Science Proficiency (and Growth)

Goal: Annually, 90% of continuously enrolled NLCS students will demonstrate growth and proficiency (at least a score of 75%) in the area of science as measured by curriculum-based assessments.

WBWF Goal Areas Addressed by this Goal: AGC, CCR

Key Measures & Results for this Goal: According to advisor records, 93% of students who took a science based seminar showed growth on formative assessments and 92% showed proficiency on summative tests. NLCS met this goal.

Indicator 8: Proficiency or Growth in Other Curricular Areas or Educational Programs

Goal: Annually, 90% of continuously enrolled NLCS students will demonstrate growth and proficiency (at least a score of 75%) in the area of social studies as measured by curriculum-based assessments.

WBWF Goal Areas Addressed by this Goal: AGC, CCR

Key Measures & Results for this Goal: According to advisor records, 91.5% of students who took a social studies based seminar showed proficiency on summative assessments. NLCS met this goal.

Indicator 9: Post Secondary Readiness

Goal: Annually, 90% of NLCS graduates will demonstrate career and/or college readiness as measured by the completion of their school story autobiography, a resume, cover letter, a career exploration, a career WiLATA essay, a mock interview, a job application, and a senior project.

WBWF Goal Areas Addressed by this Goal: AGC, CCR

Key Measures & Results for this Goal: According to teacher records, 100% of the graduating class of 2017 demonstrated college and career readiness by taking and completing the NLCS Senior Seminar. NLCS met this goal.

Indicator 10: Attendance

Goal: NLCS will increase attendance by 2% each year until we reach 96%. We will maintain an average attendance rate of 96%+ from then on.

WBWF Goal Areas Addressed by this Goal: AGC, GRAD

Key Measures & Results for this Goal: The attendance rate for 2015-16 was 88.8%. Attendance for 2016-17 was 89.9%. Attendance increased 1.1%. NLCS did not meet this goal.

Indicator A: Federal and State Accountability – World’s Best Workforce

Summary of the World’s Best Workforce data profile:

Academic Gap Closure

Subject	Student Group	Proficiency Index	Proficiency Index Target	Difference	# Students Earning One Point Needed to Reach Target in 2016	# Students Earning Half Point Needed to Reach Target in 2016
Math	White	25.00	69.06	-44.06	13	25
Math	SPED	23.91	42.05	-18.14	5	9
Math	Free/Red.	28.79	53.20	-24.41	9	17
Reading	White	56.90	73.87	-16.97	5	10
Reading	SPED	40.48	48.03	-7.55	2	4
Reading	Free/Red.	43.94	57.52	-13.58	5	9

Equitable Access to Excellent Teachers

Inexperienced Teachers	Classes Unqualified	Classes out of Field	Poverty Quartile	Minority Quartile
0.00%	31.58%	42.11%	Highest	n/a

Attain Career and College Readiness Before Graduating from High School

Grade 8 Math Proficiency 2016			
	All	Free/Reduced	White
NLCS	26.67	25.0	30.0
Region	50.63	36.06	52.89

All Students Graduated from High School

Demographic Description	2015 Four Year Count	2015 Four Year Percent	Increase needed to reach 90% goal by 2020	2015 Five Year Count	2015 Five Year Percent	2015 Six Year Count	2015 Six Year Percent
All students	11	61.11	28.89	20	64.52	10	76.92
White, not of Hispanic origin	9	64.29	25.71	15	65.22	8	72.73
Special Education			90.00	10	71.43		
Free/Reduced Lunch	7	53.85	36.15	14	58.33		

ADDITIONAL ACADEMIC DATA

Northern Lights Community School has historically had low MCA test scores. We draw students from seven area school districts and enroll new students all throughout the school year. Although

we recognize the importance and legitimacy of the annual, state required MCA tests, we also know we don't have a whole lot of control over the education students receive before they enter our program. We will continue to set goals in regard to proficiency testing, but we rely more heavily upon the NWEA MAP testing that occurs three times each year to measure our success. Our NWEA MAP testing results for 2016-17 show tremendous growth in almost all grade levels from fall of the year to winter. We did see a plateau in scores from winter to spring and because of this we are implementing new initiatives to forgo the spring slide that apparently occurs.

8. Educational Effectiveness: Assessment & Evaluation

As documented in other sections of this annual report, assessment and evaluation are an integral part of everything that happens at Northern Lights Community School. Students and staff members are constantly measuring and making decisions based on their discoveries.

Assessments take many forms including checklists, observations, rubrics, standardized tests, surveys, and pre and post experience curriculum-based exams. When the question "How will we know we have achieved this?" comes up, someone devises an appropriate measure. A fine example is the essential life skills rubric that was developed with the help of students, staff members, parents, and community members.

The following topics touch on processes and systems currently in place at the school. There is some repetition since many of the areas are also included in other parts of this report.

2016-2017 Areas of Need

Based upon the reflections of staff members and records of students' progress on academic goals, areas of need identified at the beginning of the 2016-2017 school year included strengthening the mathematics program, helping students increase reading skills, continuing work to tie seminars and student projects to core educational requirements, and maintaining acceptable student behavior expectations.

Assessing and Evaluating Each Student's Progress

The Northern Lights Community School staff seeks to identify both the strengths and needs of individual students. All types of assessments including standardized tests and locally created rubrics are used to gather evidence of progress. A key element, however, is the fact that students tend to be known well within a small school community. Advisors and project managers play key roles in building upon students' strengths and ensuring their academic progress, and each student has a personal learning plan that includes academic, behavioral and social goals. Personal learning plans are revisited throughout the academic year and twice during student-led conferences with each student's family.

Reviewing and Evaluating Instruction and Curriculum

An instructional leadership team (ILT) made up of teachers, the school director, and a parent meets weekly throughout the school year. The team is responsible for analyzing formative and summative learning data and then planning and implementing school-wide initiatives for instruction.

During the 2014-2015 school year, the ILT finalized a practice profile around the use of learning targets to help implement best practices in project-based learning. Practice profiles are now used as a system check to help inform the ILT of how successfully teachers are implementing each best practice.

Strategies for Improving Instruction, Curriculum, and Student Achievement

All teachers at Northern Lights Community School participate in the NLCS Professional Learning Community that meets for an hour and a half every other week. Purposes of the PLC include creating solutions related to student concerns, growing as professionals, sharing resources, and meeting school goals. Meetings are also designed to provide training on topics such as proctoring exams, using Project Foundry software to track students' projects, and building project-based learning teaching skills. The school offers additional teacher learning opportunities throughout the school year.

Finally, as described in the *Implementation of Primary and Additional Statutory Purposes* section, NLCS teachers are required to have annual professional learning plans, and they maintain teaching portfolios.

Effective Practices

Within Northern Lights Community School, there is an expectation that all staff members hold high expectations for students. In addition to other practices related to student and staff assessments and professional development mentioned throughout this report, the common goal of promoting student success is pursued in a variety of ways:

- The school lives by its mission. The focus remains on creating a safe and small learning community in which individuals are valued. While the mission was written with students in mind, it applies as well to staff members.
- Student learning is a priority, and staff members work to help students understand how to set and achieve learning goals. By concentrating on individual talents and interests, advisors help students set goals that are meaningful and reachable.
- Requirements for success are clear, and do-overs are an accepted means of eliminating failure.
- Staff members are full participants in operation of the school, and they share responsibility for the quality of education it provides to students.

Equitable Distribution of Experienced and Qualified Teachers

Northern Lights Community School, by deliberate design, is a small school in which each student is known well as an individual. It is also a school of choice. Teachers who work at NLCS, as well as students who enroll here, are at the school because they want to be, not because outsiders have assigned them there.

By virtue of the school's design and the staff's experience, all students work with experienced and qualified teachers. NLCS currently has 18 staff members who hold licenses in various areas (teaching, Special Education, social work, administration) with the Minnesota Department of Education. These 18 staff members have a combined 315 years of licensed educational experience with MDE. This works out to an average of 17.5 years of experience for each of them. Three of our staff have been licensed for 33 years each.

9. Student & Parent Satisfaction

Surveys of students and parents indicate high levels of satisfaction with Northern Lights Community School. For some students who have not succeeded in other public schools, NLCS offers a new environment in which to do well.

In end-of-year student surveys, NLCS students expressed strong support for their school. Surveys were distributed to all students.

- 94% agreed or strongly agreed that NLCS is the best school they have attended.
- 96% agreed or strongly agreed that their advisor really cares about them.
- 92% agreed or strongly agreed that they feel safer at NLCS than in schools they have previously attended.
- 95% agreed or strongly agreed that they are learning more at NLCS than in schools they have previously attended.
- 99% agreed or strongly agreed that they get help when they ask for it.
- 94% agreed or strongly agreed that their advisor challenges them to do their best work.
- 96% agreed or strongly agreed that learning through projects prepares them for the “real world.”
- 94% agreed or strongly agreed that they feel successful at NLCS.
- 91% agreed or strongly agreed that they are allowed to “be their own person” at NLCS.
- 94% agreed or strongly agreed that they have a better understanding of the environment since enrolling at NLCS.

Surveys were also distributed to parents. The following results are based on surveys returned.

- 100% of parents agreed or strongly agreed that NLCS is the best school their sons or daughters have attended.
- 100% agreed or strongly agreed that their son or daughter’s advisor really cares about him or her.
- 100% agreed or strongly agreed that their child is safer at NLCS than at other schools he or she attended in the past.
- 98% agreed or strongly agreed that their child learns more at NLCS than at other schools s/he has attended.
- 100% agreed or strongly agreed that their questions and concerns are answered and addressed by NLCS staff members.
- 100% agreed or strongly agreed that their child’s advisor challenges him or her to do their best.
- 100% agreed or strongly agreed that learning through projects at NLCS prepares their son or daughter for “the real world.”
- 100% agreed or strongly agreed that their son or daughter feels successful at NLCS.
- 100% agreed or strongly agreed that their son or daughter is “allowed to be their own person” at NLCS.
- 100% agreed or strongly agreed that their son or daughter has a better understanding of the environment since enrolling at NLCS.

10. Environmental Education

The mission of Northern Lights Community School’s authorizer, the Audubon Center of the North Woods, is to instill a connection and commitment to the environment in people of all communities through experiential learning. ACNW defines environmental education as the implementation of values and strategies that foster learning and create environmentally literate citizens who engage in creating healthy outcomes for individuals, communities, and the Earth. The overarching goal of environmental education is an environmentally literate citizenry. The test of environmental literacy is the capacity of an individual to work individually and collectively toward sustaining a healthy

natural environment. This requires sufficient awareness, knowledge, skills, and attitudes in order to create a healthy planet where all people live in balance with the Earth.

Northern Lights Community School strives to help students be environmentally aware and responsible citizens. The staff supports the idea that students are better equipped to understand needs on a global scale when they have a strong understanding of how their school affects the local community. NLCS offers environmental science through curriculum-based and standards-aligned seminars that involve inquiry, place-based activities, problem solving, and stewardship. A seminar is offered during each block of the school year, and each has both pre and post assessment activities to measure student learning. Evaluation methods include the NLCS project rubric, NLCS seminar curriculum-based assessments, staff data tracking, and field experiences. NLCS students also have many opportunities to interact with nature in Itasca County, as well as on occasional trips out of the region. At the same time, they are constantly exposed to environmentally positive practices right on the school campus. In addition to the greenhouse, garden, and community recycling center, there are visible efforts to conserve energy such as use of LED lighting, and attempts to use renewable energy via passive solar, solar voltaic and the geothermal heating system. Students see daily evidence that their school not only talks about the environment but also makes an effort to support it.

NLCS is a member of the International Green Schools Alliance — a worldwide effort that involves schools in sharing and implementing ways to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. In recent years, students have created a recycling center open to community use and have taken on the task of measuring and finding use for waste material from the breakfast and lunch program. Their hands-on efforts to help the school and community also provide real reasons to use math and communications skills. In addition, current students can access and use data about the school's solar voltaic system through their computers or via the NLCS website.

Staff members continue to learn about different aspects of environmental education through trainings and workshops during the school year, and they work to incorporate environmental education practices throughout the NLCS curriculum. To measure the effectiveness of the school's emphasis on environmental learning, NLCS students take an environmental literacy test each fall and spring. Over the past three years, results have shown a positive trend.

Challenges to maintaining an environmental education program are similar to those of maintaining other effective practices within a project-based school: professional development, curriculum mapping, finding ways to integrate environmental education in the often-tested academic areas of reading and math, and finding ways to fund all of the interesting initiatives staff members and students would like to pursue.

Successes for the 2016-17 school year included:

1. The YES! Club taught 4th graders environmental awareness at Hill City and Floodwood elementary schools.
2. Students visited the Wolf Ridge Environmental Center for three days in March.
3. Students promoted a rusty crayfish invasive species awareness project to the community.
4. The school finished a building-wide changeover from incandescent light bulbs to LED.

11. Governance & Management – Includes Annual Board Training & Administrator Professional Development Report(s)

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

The Northern Lights Community School Board of Directors had 11 regular monthly meetings during the 2016-2017 school year. In addition to board members, Mike Hamernick (the school's director), Lee Matson (the school's financial advisor), and Becky McCauley (the school's business manager) typically attended meetings. After approval, board minutes were posted on the school's website (www.nlcschool.org).

The board of directors met on the third Tuesday of the month and provided oversight for finance, operations, and academic aspects of the school. A typical meeting included examination of current financial data, a report from the school director (operations, environmental projects, academic data), and a review of one or more school policies. The board holds the NLCS director responsible for day-to-day operation of the school, and each year board members evaluate the director's work through a process defined by school policy.

The most recent election of board members took place at the school's orientation evening in August 2016.

Board Membership Table:

Name	Board Position	Affiliation	First Seated	Term Ends	E-mail Address	Attendance
Matt Alleva	Chair	Teacher	June 2013	Oct. 2017	malleva@hotmail.com	91%
Zachary McNeil	Member	Community Member	Oct. 2015	Oct. 2017	pastorzach@goodlandchurch.org	82%
Karen Fleming	Secretary	Teacher/ Founder	Sept. 2006	Oct. 2016	fleminka@paulbunyan.net	100%
Art Norton	Member	Community Member	June 2013	Oct. 2017	artnorton12@gmail.com	91%
Josie Pitts-Lobe	Treasurer	Teacher	Oct. 2012	Oct. 2018	josieleepitts@gmail.com	91%
Shannon Zozgornik	Member	Parent	Sep. 2016	Oct. 2018	zozgornik@hotmail.com	91%
Don Vidal	Member	Teacher	Aug. 2012	Oct. 2016	dvidal007@yahoo.com	91%

Board Training and Development

The school board members followed a training schedule set at the beginning of the school year that covered all required areas for new members and fostered continued learning and development of the board. Most in-house trainings were taken from the book *Charter School Board University* by Brian L. Carpenter, Ph.D. Some members sought out individual training at off-site conferences throughout the year.

Initial Training

All board members who served prior to the 2016-2017 school year completed board training required by the Minnesota Department of Education on the dates included in the chart below. The newest member, Shannon Zozgornik, met the initial training requirements within five months of being seated on the board.

Initial Training				
Board Member Name	Original Date Seated	Board's Role & Responsibilities	Employment Policies & Practices	Financial Management
Matt Alleva	June 2013	3/8/2014 Charles Speiker	3/8/2014 Charles Speiker	3/8/2014 Charles Speiker
Karen Fleming	Sept. 2006	June 2006 EdVisions Summer Institute	June 2006 EdVisions Summer Institute	June 2006 EdVisions Summer Institute
Art Norton	June 2013	3/8/2014 Charles Speiker	3/8/2014 Charles Speiker	3/8/2014 Charles Speiker
Josie Pitts-Lobe	Oct. 2012	10/10/2012 Charles Speiker	10/10/2012 Charles Speiker	10/10/2012 Charles Speiker
Don Vidal	Aug. 2012	10/10/2012 Charles Speiker	10/10/2012 Charles Speiker	10/10/2012 Charles Speiker
Zachary McNeil	Oct. 2015	3/22/2016 Tom DeGree	3/22/2016 Tom DeGree	3/22/2016 Tom DeGree
Shannon Zozgornik	Sept. 2016	10/25/2016 Art Norton	11/12/2016 Beth Finch	1/17/2017 Zach McNeil

Annual Training

Annual Training - FY17			
Board Member Name	Training #1: What Governing & Parenting Have in Common, Charter School Board University, Oct. 25, 2017	Training #2: ACNW Charter School Leadership Conference, ACNW, Nov. 11-12, 2017	Training #3: Student Performance & Finances, Charter School Board University, Jan. 17, 2018
Matt Alleva	Attended? YES	Attended? YES	Attended? YES
Karen Fleming	Attended? YES	Attended? YES	Attended? YES
Art Norton	Attended? YES	Attended? YES	Attended? YES
Josie Pitts-Lobe	Attended? YES	Attended? YES	Attended? YES
Don Vidal	Attended? YES	Attended? NO	Attended? NO
Zachary McNeil	Attended? YES	Attended? NO	Attended? YES
Shannon Zozgornik	Attended? YES	Attended? YES	Attended? YES

MANAGEMENT

Northern Lights Community School is a member of EdVisions Cooperative. For a fee, EdVisions provides payroll services and includes NLCS in an insurance program. Faculty members may also participate in staff development activities such as conversation days that are sponsored by the cooperative.

A five-member personnel team meets as needed to interview potential employees, review job performances, and make recommendations to the board. Members in 2016-2017 included Karen

Fleming (board and staff member), Henry Chung (project manager and tech specialist), Mike Hamernick (director), Josie Pitts (board member and special education coordinator), and Becky McCauley (business manager).

The school also has a four-member finance committee that meets to review spending and budgets and prepare recommendations for the board. Finance committee members during 2016-2017 included Mike Hamernick (director), Lee Matson (financial consultant), Becky McCauley (business manager), and Josie Pitts (board treasurer).

Day-to-day operation of the school is the responsibility of the licensed teaching staff (NLCS is a teacher-led program) with oversight from the school director. The director takes direction from, and is evaluated by, the school board.

The 2016-17 school year saw a larger than normal turnover in staffing. Nine employees, including three of the eight licensed teaching staff, left at various points during the year. Although it was inconvenient to have to replace so many people, it did open the opportunity to make some specific hiring decisions (like hiring a teacher with a math license) to improve the teaching and learning.

LIST OF ADMINISTRATORS/QUALIFICATIONS

Director – Mike D. Hamernick

Mike Hamernick spent the first sixteen years of his career in education as a high school English teacher at the Area Learning Center in the White Bear Lake School District. He has a Masters in Education through Saint Mary's University and holds a Minnesota K-12 Principal's license. Mike is currently enrolled in the University of Minnesota Principal's Leadership Academy.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN FOR: Mike D. Hamernick, Director

Mike Hamernick joined the Northern Lights Community School staff as director in August of 2016. The following section details work on personal development goals he set in fall 2016.

Professional Development Goals/Areas of Focus for 2016-17:

1. Work with the Minnesota Center of Excellence to better identify areas where Northern Lights Community School can improve as well as the best strategies available to address those areas.
2. Enroll and be accepted into the University of Minnesota Principals Academy – Twin Cities cohort for fall 2017.
3. Work with the Itasca Area School Collaborative (IASC) to better support NLCS initiatives.
4. Research an effective teacher evaluation tool more appropriate for a project-based school.

Activities Completed/Progress/Results for 2016-17:

1. Collaboration continued with a member of the Minnesota Center for Excellence. Much of the work focused on equitable access to education and strengthening our math program. One sub-goal of improving our math program was to find and hire a licensed math teacher. A licensed math teacher was hired by the end of the 2017 school year.
2. Mike was accepted into the MN Principals Academy for fall of 2017. The school board agreed to subsidize this valuable training.
3. Mike attended most of the monthly IASC Administrative Committee meetings and the board meetings. NLCS will continue to maintain relationships with local districts.

4. Mike reached out to other project-based schools in the nation and discussed teacher evaluation with several administrators. Several tools have been considered and will be put in place in 2017-18 after review by the leadership team.

Professional Development Goals/Areas of Focus for 2017-18:

1. Develop, advocate for, and enact a shared vision for high student achievement supported by a culture of high expectations and family engagement
2. Provide instructional leadership for high student academic performance
3. Develop and maintain a high-quality, effective staff
4. Demonstrate ethical personal leadership through relationship building, effective communication, and self-reflection
5. Strategically manage and monitor school systems and operations

12. Staffing

All of the advisors and project managers for the 2016-2017 school year were Northern Lights Community School veterans. One of the advisors, who was a key planner in the years leading up to opening the school, has been part of the staff since NLCS began operating over a decade ago.

Because total student enrollment is only 105, the school maintains a small teaching staff. As a result, all teachers spend part of each day teaching or advising outside their area of licensure, and the school annually applies for and receives waivers from the Minnesota Board of Teaching to “facilitate delivery of an innovative program.” A list of licensed teachers follows.

2016-17 Staffing

2016-17 Licensed Teaching Staff				
Name	File #	License and Assignment (subject/grades)	2017-18 Status*	Comments
Chad Olson	459517	5-12 Social Studies	NR	Advisor with waiver
Suzanne Starr	256037	7-12 Social Studies	NR	Advisor with waiver
LaDonna Hanson	393851	K-12 PE K-12 Adapted PE	R	Advisor with waiver
Matt Alleva	999980	5-8 Science 5-8 Earth & Space Science	R	Advisor with waiver
Karen Fleming	404331	5-12 Comm. Arts/Lit.	R	Advisor with waiver
Donald Vidal	335136	K-12 Band 5-12 Classroom Music	R	
Gail Otteson	298752	1-6 Elementary	NR	Title I with waiver
Thomas Massich	421831	K-6 Elementary Ed. 5-8 Comm. Arts/Lit.	R	SPED support with waiver

* R = Returning, NR = Not Returning

2016-17 Teacher Professional Development Activities:

Professional development is a priority at NLCS. A professional development plan is created each school year based on teacher surveys, student data, and input from the director. Every other Monday, teachers participate in a practical training that covers a topic identified by the staff.

Teachers and other staff members have opportunities to play lead roles in the trainings and workshops, and continuing education credits are awarded for participation.

Each teacher at NLCS is required to have a professional learning plan that contains at least four goals — two of which address the areas of math and reading. Teachers are evaluated twice a year on the following items: performance, lesson observation, and progress on their professional learning plans. Each teacher also has a teaching portfolio created around requirements established by the leadership team.

Specific professional development activities during the 2016-2017 school year included the following:

- Staff attended a learning symposium hosted by High Tech High School (a California Charter School) in Minneapolis, MN.
- Staff members attended the annual Minnesota Association of Alternative Programs conference in Mankato, MN.
- Staff attended a two day leadership conference at the Audubon Center of the North Woods in Sandstone, MN.
- Staff attended a Project-Based Learning conference in Henderson, MN.
- Staff attended a charter school symposium at Hamline University.
- Staff attended a charter school conference in St. Paul, MN.
- Staff attended several environmental education related conferences throughout the state.
- Staff members attended a variety of other professional development activities based on their individual interests and needs.

Teacher Retention:

Northern Lights Community School has historically had a high retention rate for licensed teaching and Special Education staff. The most turnover tends to occur at the paraprofessional level as needs change frequently depending on student enrollment. 2016-17 saw a higher-than-normal attrition rate as some staff experienced health related issues and others decided to try their hand at teaching elsewhere.

Percentage of Licensed Teachers from 2016-17 not returning in 2017-18	38%
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2016-17 Other Licensed (non-teaching) Staff				
Name	File #	License and Assignment	2017-18 Status*	Comments
Mike D. Hamernick	365871	Director	R	
Tamera Pulver	412668	SPED Director	R	
Josie Pitts-Lobe	458734	SPED Coordinator/ Case Manager	R	
Aimee Love	477317	Social Worker	R	
Lori Hutchins	261154	SPED Case Manager	R	
Katherine Christel Rowe	288783	SPED Case Manager	R	
Kimberly A Miller	473332	SPED Case Manager	R	
Ryan Bajan	470713	SPED Case Manager	NR	
Jill Hawk	285762	Project Manager	R	

* R = Returning, NR = Not Returning

2016-17 Non-Licensed Staff			
Name	Assignment	2017-18 Status*	Comments
Kelly Broberg	Paraprofessional	R	
Heather Bunes	Paraprofessional	R	
Charlie Butler	Paraprofessional	NR	
Danny Friedman	Paraprofessional	NR	
Maisie Petersburg	Paraprofessional	R	
Zachary Imes	Paraprofessional	R	
Joe Morrissey	Paraprofessional	NR	
Rachel Carlson	Head Cook	R	
Jeanette McCartney	Kitchen Assistant	R	
Henry Chung	Technology	R	
Jackie Esler	Clerical	R	
Loretta Hamm	Project Manager	R	
Benita Hassell	Project Manager	R	
Victoria Kepler	Project Manager	R	
C.J. Shakelton	Project Manager	R	
Annie Humphrey	Indian Ed. Coordinator	R	
Becky McCauley	Business Manager	R	
Cynthia Schroeder	Office Manager	R	
Todd Utech	Custodian	NR	
Don LaPlant	Building Manager	NR	
Bill Lah	AmeriCorps Volunteer	NR	
Nate Hassell	AmeriCorps Volunteer	R	

* R = Returning, NR = Not Returning

CURRENT YEAR - 2017-18 Staffing

2017-18 Licensed Teaching Staff			
Name	File #	License and Assignment (subject/grades)	Comments
Leah Bridgeford	418504	5-12 Social Studies	Advisor with waiver
Eric Ljosenvoor	440757	5-12 Mathematics	Advisor with waiver
LaDonna Hanson	393851	K-12 PE K-12 Adapted PE	Advisor with waiver
Matt Alleva	455234	5-8 Science 5-8 Earth & Space Science	Advisor with waiver
Karen Fleming	404331	5-12 Comm. Arts/Lit.	Advisor with waiver
Donald Vidal	335136	K-12 Band 5-12 Classroom Music	
Daniel Friedman	418128	5-12 Comm. Arts/Lit.	Title I with waiver
Thomas Massich	421831	K-6 Elementary Ed. 5-8 Comm. Arts/Lit.	SPED support with waiver

2017-18 Other Licensed (non-teaching) Staff			
Name	File #	Assignment	Comments
Mike D. Hamernick	365871	Director	
Tamera Pulver	412668	SPED Director	Contracted
Josie Pitts-Lobe	458734	SPED Coordinator/ Case Manager	
Aimee Love	477317	Social Worker	
Lori Hutchins	261154	SPED Case Manager	
Katherine Christel Rowe	288783	SPED Case Manager	
Kimberly A Miller	473332	SPED Case Manager	
Janice Lippitt	413046	School Psychologist	Contracted
Gail Otteson	298752	1 to 1 Paraprofessional	
Jill Hawk	285762	Project Manager	

2017-18 Non-Licensed Staff		
Name	Assignment	Comments
Kelly Broberg	Paraprofessional	
Heather Bunes	Paraprofessional	
Charlie Butler	Paraprofessional	
Maisie Petersburg	Paraprofessional	
Veronica Hassell	Paraprofessional	
Cassey Hamilton	Paraprofessional	
Rachel Carlson	Head Cook	
Jeanette McCartney	Kitchen Assistant	
Henry Chung	Technology	
Jackie Esler	Clerical	
Loretta Hamm	Project Manager	
Benita Hassell	Project Manager	
Victoria Kepler	Project Manager	
C.J. Shakelton	Project Manager	
Annie Humphrey	Indian Ed. Coordinator	
Becky McCauley	Business Manager	
Cynthia Schroeder	Office Manager	
Chuck Burress	Custodian	
Nate Hassell	AmeriCorps Volunteer	

13. Operational Performance

Northern Lights Community School complies with all applicable laws and meets required deadlines for submitting required reports to the Minnesota Department of Education, the Audubon Center of the North Woods, and to other government and nonprofit agencies with which it works. The school posts board minutes, authorizer information, application materials, and other informative material on its website – www.nlcschool.org.

Comprehensive information for students and parents is included in the Northern Lights Community School Student and Parent Handbook which is available online or in the school office. The handbook includes the school calendar, contact information, graduation requirements, and short descriptions of policies that affect students and staff members. The board of directors reviews and updates policies throughout the year to ensure that they are compliant with state and federal requirements, and the policy manual covers all required areas including (but not limited to) health and safety at the school, student discipline, nondiscrimination, employee rights, hazing prohibition, and Internet use.

Northern Lights Community School meets state requirements for operation of the school food program which includes breakfasts and lunches. Lunch counts are recorded on a daily basis, and the kitchen manager follows National School Lunch and Minnesota Department of Education Food and Nutrition Service program guidelines. Because of the high percentage of students eligible for free and reduced price meals, NLCS applied for and was included for a third year in the Community Eligibility Provision, a federal program that facilitates providing free breakfasts and lunches to all students within a school.

During the 2016-2017 school year, the majority of daily student transportation was arranged through an agreement with the Arrowhead Economic Opportunity Agency. Additional routes were managed using school vehicles and school staff members as drivers.

The school building and grounds provide a safe and positive learning environment for students, and students' survey responses indicate that they feel comfortable at NLCS. The campus includes a greenhouse and garden in addition to classrooms, a gym, and meeting space. The Northern Lights Building Company, a separate entity, oversees long-term maintenance of the building.

NLCS uses a fair hiring process that includes postings of job openings and interviews of prospective staff members, and the school has a standing personnel committee. The school requires background checks for all staff and board members as well as volunteers.

Parents are involved in conferences and are welcomed to the school for special events during the year as well as at any time they arrange to speak with staff members. Parents and community members are encouraged to volunteer at the school, and many become resources as students develop projects.

Students enroll during an annual spring registration period as well as during the school year as long as openings are available. NLCS has a lottery protocol in place should spring applications outnumber capacity for students.

A complete set of policies — all approved by the board of directors and designed to meet state and federal requirements — is in place to cover school operation. The policies include the process for dealing with student discipline.

14. Finances

The Northern Lights Community School Board of Directors reviews financial material at the beginning of each monthly meeting, approves payment of bills, and makes adjustments to the budget as needed. Lee Matson, a certified public accountant, provides accounting services for the

school and attends board meetings in person or via telephone in order to discuss financial matters with board members. He also works closely with the director and business manager.

Information included here is derived from preliminary audit figures for the 2016-2017 school year. The full financial audit will be completed and presented to the Minnesota Department of Education and the Audubon Center of the North Woods no later than December 31, 2017.

For questions regarding school finances and for complete financials for 2016-17 and/or an organizational budget for 2017-18, contact:

Name: Becky McCauley
Position: Business Manager
Phone: (218)492-4400
Email: beckymccauley@frontiernet.net

Lee Matson, CPA, provides accounting services for Northern Lights Community School.

Information presented below is derived from preliminary audit figures. The full financial audit will be completed and presented to the Minnesota Department of Education and Audubon Center of the North Woods no later than December 31, 2017. Lee Matson, CPA, provides accounting and consulting services to the board of directors of Northern Lights Community School and is not independent with respect to Northern Lights Community School. The following information was not audited by Lee Matson, CPA, and, accordingly, Lee Matson, CPA, does not express an opinion regarding this information.

FY17 Finances	Fund 1	Fund 2
Total Revenues	\$1,978,746	\$86,123
Total Expenditures	\$1,978,746	\$86,123
Net Income	0	0
Total Fund Balance	\$393,746	0

Overview

The school's financial position is sound. The actual average daily membership (ADM) during 2016-2017 was 102.24, slightly higher than the budgeted ADM of 102.

Revenues

The bulk of the school's revenue, 95%, comes from the State of Minnesota. Most is in the form of *General Education Aid* that is the basic per pupil unit allowance paid to each school district. In addition, the school receives *Lease Aid*, a source of state funding that provides assistance to charter schools by paying a percentage of rent for school buildings.

Expenses

Roughly 37% of the school's expenses are related to the special education program. Northern Lights Community School has provided a quality educational experience for students with special needs since its opening in 2005. The bulk of the remaining expenses are spent in the classrooms, primarily for the salaries and fringe benefits of advisors and project managers.

Net Surplus or Deficit and Fund Balance

The fund balance is currently 20% of total expenditures. The goal of the board of directors is to have a fund balance equal to 25% of total expenditures by FY20. The fund balance reserve acts as a hedge against unforeseen circumstances and is a source of financing for future capital expenses.

World's Best Workforce Annual Budget

Northern Lights Community School's school improvement initiatives correlate with World's Best Workforce goals. There was no separate WBWF budget during the 2016-2017 school year.

Additional financial information is available through the school's business manager, Becky McCauley.

15. Future Plans

There are no plans for growth or expansion of the program. As part of the school's mission to create a safe and small learning community, the board of directors established a 105-student enrollment cap several years ago. Directors feel class sizes are appropriate, and they prefer to maintain the enrollment cap.

In the year ahead, the board of directors hopes to continue to work toward creating a 1:1 student-to-computer ratio and making other hardware upgrades to our server. The Northern Lights Building Company has also procured a grant that will cover physical upgrades to the building including more LED lights, security cameras, and more secure entrances.