

North Lakes Academy



A public charter middle school serving students in grades six through nine.



255B NW 7th Avenue ♦ Forest Lake, MN 55025
(651) 982-2773 ♦ FAX (651) 464-6409

Annual Report
SY 2007-08

Introduction

North Lakes Academy (NLA) is a charter school located in Forest Lake, Minnesota, a community north of Saint Paul, Minnesota. The school was organized by a group of Forest Lake parents and teachers seeking an alternative to the large junior high schools available to the children in the community. NLA was chartered in spring of 1999 and opened for operation in fall 1999. The school has served students in grades six through nine since its inception. Spring of 2008 the charter was renewed by MDE for SY2008-09 through SY2010-11.

During the 2007-2008 school year the NLA Board authorized the additions of grades 5 and 10 for SY 2008-09, grade 11 for SY 2009-10 and grade 12 for SY 2010-11. The expansion proposal was approved by MDE on 4/18/08.

In addition to math, science, language arts and social studies, the disciplines of modern language, visual arts, musical arts, physical education and technology use are considered core academic areas at North Lakes.

NLA provides experiential courses based on a balance of skills, content, and character development. In keeping with the school's mission, the concept of "learning community" is key to a North Lakes Academy educational experience. NLA has developed a small, personalized environment that encourages high levels of parent involvement, local community interaction, teacher autonomy, and student responsibility. NLA employs a shared decision making model, which ensures accountability for all stake holders.

In addition to state mandated tests, North Lakes Academy administers NWEA tests fall and spring, as well as progress testing as needed for specific students.

Philosophy, Vision, Mission

Philosophy:

North Lakes Academy is a public charter middle school that values the dignity and worth of all persons and does not discriminate on the basis of race, religion, national and ethnic origin, sex, physical handicap, or learning styles/abilities.

Vision: North Lakes Academy will provide an environment in which secondary school students will learn eagerly, extensively and deeply in order that they will be able to assume productive and satisfying roles in a global society.

Mission: In SY 2007-08 NLA revised its mission from:

North Lakes Academy will provide a rigorous liberal arts education in a personalized and developmentally appropriate learning environment to prepare grade six through nine students to be citizens in a global society.

to

North Lakes Academy will provide a rigorous, liberal arts curriculum in a small, personalized, developmentally appropriate learning environment to prepare students to be successful at the college of their choice.

Sponsor Information

The Minnesota Department of Education sponsors North Lakes Academy and has since its inception. Sponsor liaison for this reporting period was Stephanie Olsen. Annual reports are filed with the sponsor as well as copies of all board minutes and bi-weekly newsletters. Ms. Olsen visits NLA at least twice annually to review the annual report and file on-site observation reports. The Department also receives a copy of the annual audit and all other financial reports.

Governance

The NLA Board of Directors is composed of the following member positions:

Four 3-year teacher terms
One 1-year teacher term
Three 1-year parent terms
One 1-year parent term
Director (ex-officio)
Business manager (ex-officio)

Board action in 2007 moved Board Elections from January to November to coincide with conferences. Nominations are accepted in October and candidates are introduced at the annual meeting that month. Variable term lengths require the election of one or more positions each year. As of 2008, teachers are required to serve at least one term on the Board every five years of employment. The chair is elected by and from the board for the length of one year.

North Lakes Academy Board

Member: DD Abrams, Teacher Representative

Biography: DD Abrams has been a teacher for 18 years. She has a BS in Special Education, MA in curriculum and instruction, LD license and EBD license. She has experience in district public school and charter public schools in Minnesota.

Member: Jim Carter, Teacher Representative

Biography: Jim Carter has a BS in elective studies and special education. He has been working as a special education teacher at NLA since 2004.

Member: Caroline Little, Teacher Representative

Biography: Caroline Little has been working in education for 13 years. She has an elementary license, a MA in Technology in Education and is currently working on her K-12 principal license. She has experience in the elementary classroom, middle school classroom and as a professional development consultant for an educational software company. Caroline has been at NLA since 2001. She began her career with NLA as the Technology Coordinator and is currently working as the Assistant Director.

Member: Dan Mendenhall, Teacher Representative

Biography: Dan Mendenhall has a BS in elementary education and a 5-8 general science license. Dan has worked as a para-professional and a substitute teacher before he came to NLA. Dan has been working at NLA since 2006 as a middle school science teacher.

Member: Paula Nystrom, Teacher Representative

Biography: Paula Nystrom has been a teacher in public and private schools for 26 years. She has been the Literary Arts teacher at NLA since the school opened in 1999. She has served on the NLA school board before

Member: Lisa Iverson, Parent Representative

Biography: Lisa Iverson has been a parent of students at NLA since 2002. She has been very involved in extra curricular activities. Lisa is also an active member of the local business community.

Member: Mike Jensen, Parent Representative

Biography: Mike Jensen works for Anoka Co. He is a volunteer fire fighter for the Wyoming, fire department. He is a father of five and three of his children attended NLA. He is a member of the board at the fire department.

Member: Charlie Schumacher, Parent Representative

Biography: Charlie Schumacher has a Masters degree in business management and over 12 years of leadership experience in three high tech companies. He has held strategic management, projects management and process development roles in international engineering, manufacturing, and IT organizations. He is a NLA parent and community member.

Staff

NLA School Management & Administrative Team

School Director: Jackie Saunders jsaunders@northlakesacademy.org

Assistant Director: Caroline Little cmlittle@northlakesacademy.org

School Business Director: Jan Jensen jjensen@northlakesacademy.org

Administrative Assistant: Cheri Jensen cjensen@northlakesacademy.org

Dean of Students: Kerry Huset khuset@northlakesacademy.org

Reading & Volunteer Coordinator: Ann Knops aknops@northlakesacademy.org

Special Services Coordinator Marketing & Fundraising: Jennie Senapatiratne

jsenapatiratne@northlakesacademy.org

Current Teaching Roster
(Average Class Size 20:1)

Name	Subject Area	File Folder #	Degree(s)	Yrs at NLA	Total Yrs Teaching
Dianne Abrams	Special Education	325635	EBD/LD	2	19

Jim Carter	Special Education	418154	BA/SLD	4	5
Terry Darwin	Social Studies	242675	Social Studies/ Drivers Ed/ Coach	9	32
Laura DelVillar	Spanish	388150	BA/Elementary	8	
Dave Engen	Math (upper school)			8	
Kerry Huset	Physical Education	301146	Phy-Ed/ Coaching	9	9
Pat Johnson	English (middle school)	195694	7-12 English/ Language Arts	9	16
Dan Mendenhall	Science (middle school)	411960	K-6 Elementary Ed/ 5-9 Science	2	2
David Montes	Math (middle school)	389596	7-12 Math/ Middle School Spanish	8	9
Paula Nystrom	English (upper school)	263530	7-12 English – Language/ Secondary Reading/ Social Studies	9	29
Jeff Rapp	Music	303298	K-12 Music/Band	5	18
Ben Saunders	Science (upper school)	432318	Life Science	1	1
Katy Schwirtz	Social Studies (middle school)	435954	5-8 Social Studies	1	2
Joelle O'Keefe	Visual Arts	383297	K-12 Visual Arts	5	9

Student Background-Demographics Student Participation

Information to be pulled by MDE from MDE data as instructed.

Program Successes and Best Practice

North Lakes has a number of particularly strong programs. One remains the Code of Conduct, which drives every decision in the building and has proven to be a powerful tool in classroom management and character development. The Code applies to parents, students and teachers alike. *“All behavior will contribute in a positive manner to our learning community.”*

At North Lakes it is not enough to be neutral, to do no harm. Every individual has a responsibility to make the community a better place to be for him or herself and all the other members. This applies to academics as well as behavior.

Most middle school educators are familiar with the discipline scenario in which a student acts out, is called to task, and defends him or herself by claiming, “But it

didn't hurt anything." At North Lakes students learn early and often that the question will be, "How did your behavior help us to learn more effectively?" If the answer is, "It didn't," the student will need to make it right. Staff helps the student figure out a way to use the experience to improve learning.

Another strength is the number of parents and staff willing to offer extra-curricular activities to students on a volunteer basis. As NLA reserves most of its funds to hire and retain expert teachers, keep class size below 20 students and provide learners with quality materials, we do not offer stipends to coaches or club sponsors. Never the less, NLA offers the following activities:

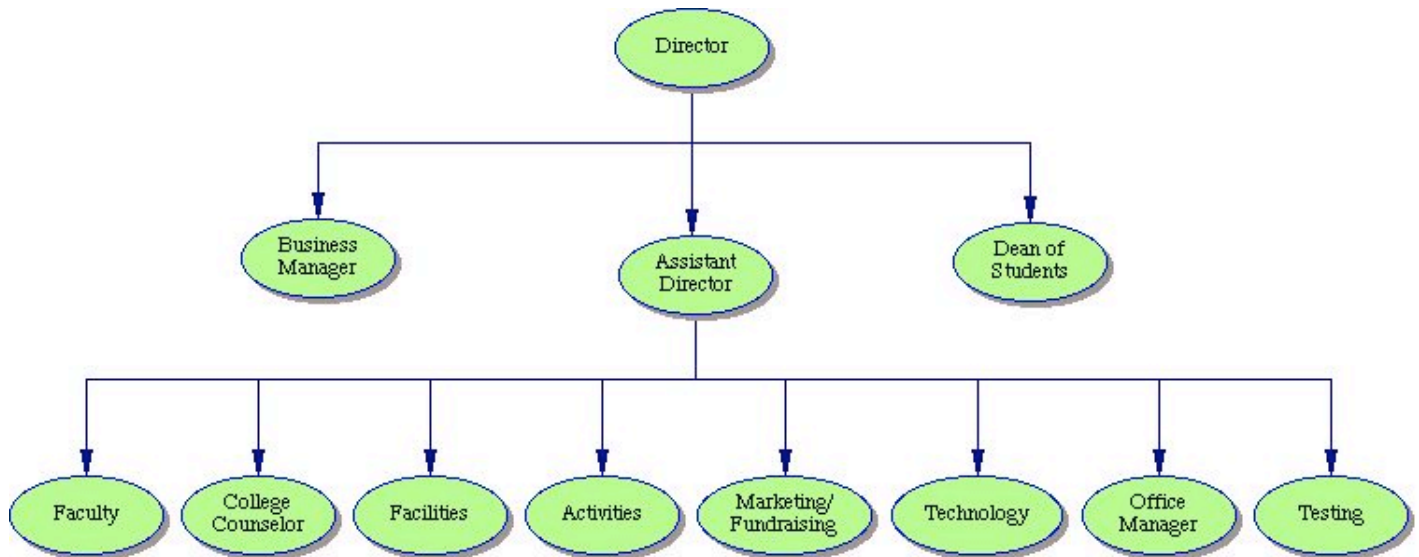
<i>Activity</i>	<i>When (before, during, or after school)?</i>
Student Council*	During (lunch) and after school
Speech Club*	After school
Chess Club*	After school
Ski Club**	After school on Friday nights
Fall Community Bonding Retreat*	One school day in fall; all grades attend
History, Music, Theater Field Trips*	During school
Yearbook	After school
Driver's Classroom Education	After school, three sessions
Peer Counseling	During school
Theater	After school
Model Building Club	After school, one semester
Art Club	After school
Girl's Night (anti-bullying)	After school, weekly

Class size remains small with a 15 to one student staff ratio. The computer ratio is three to one.

NLA requires all ninth graders to prepare and present a capstone project that integrates their learning experiences at the school. The capstone projects are presented to the school and the parent community at the school's year-end banquet. NLA intends to expand this program to include broadcasting the capstone projects on the local cable television and radio stations.

Parent support and involvement is an additional strength. During SY 2007-08 a group of parents initiated an exploration of options regarding NLA expanding to include additional grades. Parent surveys and focus groups designed and overwhelmingly supported an expansion plan designed to make NLA a 5-12 college preparatory school by 2011.

In the spring of 2008 NLA restructured its organizational structure to align with the chart below. This restructuring was designed to improve teacher evaluation and provide the Director with additional time to focus on curriculum / instruction and improving test scores.



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Grades 6/7 have an active advisory program designed to improve student study skills. All students check grades weekly and are encouraged to adjust quality, effort and timeliness accordingly. The advisory classes also include a character-building component.

Grades 8/9 have one class per quarter called "Investigations." These are courses designed to offer students exploratory opportunities in areas not available in the more structured curriculum. Investigation courses include: Bridge Building, Driver's Education, Writing Circle, Song Writing, CSI Science, Yearbook Production, Ceramics, Poetry of Rock Music.

Two examples: The Driver's education class offered to grade nine students not only completes the state requirements for a student to earn a driver's permit, it supplements with car maintenance and safety exercises. Students head to the parking lot and time themselves in identifying the parts of an engine. They spend a class period at a local intersection counting the number of driver's who make

moving violations and/or are driving while talking on cell phones, applying make-up etc,

The Bridge Building class not only offers engineering opportunities, students also form mock construction companies, banks, etc. They must file business plans, stay in budget, and the term with a bridge that will hold the required weight.

NLA language arts classes regularly find “real” audiences for student writing by tailoring assignments to fit contests and publishing events. Student work has been entered in at least six arenas and NLA students are often published.

North Lakes sponsored a School Choice Fair Thursday, January 24 from 4:30 - 8:00 pm at North Lakes. Area schools set up booths, as did vendors of local spirit wear, etc.

Objectives were:

1. Help Lakes area residents learn more about local school choices
2. Allow families to meet many school options in one convenient location
3. Allow families to compare available choices
4. Promote the idea of school choice

The following schools attended:

- > Agriculture and Food Sciences Academy
- > Centennial Schools
- > Chisago Lakes Area Schools
- > Chisago Baptist School
- > Forest Lake Area Schools
- > Hero (Home Educators Resource Organization)
- > Lakes International Language Academy
- > Maranatha School
- > Math Science Academy
- > North Branch Schools
- > North Lakes Academy
- > St. Peter's Elementary School
- > TRIO Wolf Creek Distance Learning Charter School
- > White Bear Lake Schools

The Fair was well attended and received considerable coverage in local papers. The school plans to continue, perhaps expand, the Choice Fair in future years.

NLA students also participated in a number of volunteer opportunities in the Forest Lake area. Examples include:

-Students and teachers grow hair to donate to Locks of Love and participate in an annual “Spring Shearing” event supported by a local hair salon.

-Students and teachers participate bi-annually in Pennies for Patients. In addition to basic donations, students may “purchase” through donations the opportunity to wear pajamas to school, earn Huskie Bucks, etc.

-North Lakes is located on the Hardwood Trail Bike Path. The school community routinely picks up trash along the path.

-The NLA “Trailer Band” annually marches in the Forest Lakes Area Fourth of July parade

Program Challenges

Certain aspects of enrollment continued to provide challenges in 2007-08. In terms of finances, 200 students appears to be “the magic number.” At 200 students we can pay our bills, manage cash flow and buy down the debt incurred when the holdover percentage changed from 10% to 20% a few years back. Unfortunately, enrollment remains around 175 to 190, regardless of efforts at communication, publicity, etc. The 2007-08 enrollment average was 176.

Analysis indicates that there are two major factors in perpetuating this challenge. One is that NLA has been a middle school only. It stands alone in the local community as lacking in either a feeder elementary school or follow-up high school. Interviews with families who have considered enrolling at NLA and then declined the opportunity indicate that nearly 100% of those who come for an interview and/or tour perceive the school to offer a rigorous, high quality education. They choose not to enroll, however, due to concerns about the student needing to attend a different high school in four years.

In 2007 the Board voted to meet this challenge by authorizing NLA to expand to include both a middle and high school.

The goal is to establish a college preparatory school that encourages young people of all socio-economic backgrounds and family histories regarding college enrollment to consider, and be prepared for, post secondary college options. The school mission was revised accordingly. (See Mission Statement)

The other factor affecting initial enrollment appears to be the difficulty in communicating NLA’s charter and mission to the larger community. “A rigorous, liberal arts curriculum delivered in a developmentally appropriate manner” is a solid basis for a small, best practice middle school. Families who enroll are almost universally satisfied and turnover among students is low. It does not, however, make for good sound bytes for prospective families. Schools which are chartered for things like language immersion, arts focus, science focus, etc. seem to resonate more intensely and immediately with the public.

In 2007 the Board voted to meet this challenge and address both issues by authorizing NLA to expand to include both a middle and high school. As delineated in the expansion proposal submitted to MDE, growing the school to a 5-12 college preparatory model would address both the need to provide families with a more comprehensive option than is now available as well as allow the school to fine tune its focus from “rigorous, liberal arts” to college prep.

An additional challenge is that while the NLA curriculum generally aligns with state tests in skills / content matter our cross graded program means testing topics are not always covered at the precise age the state testing is to occur.

The staff restructuring described in the Best Practice section above was designed, in part, to address this issue. In addition, classes in SY 2008-09 will follow a more traditional grade level schedule which will match more directly with state standardized testing.

Accountability Data

The chart below compares the percentage of continuously enrolled NLA students at grades 6/7/8 who achieved MCAII scores of *mastery* or *exceeds mastery* with those same categories for grades 6/7/8 in some surrounding schools. (It should be emphasized that for accuracy of comparison the scores for the other schools were limited to those in grades 6/7/8

	NLA	State	Pact*	Chisago	#831
Math	61%	54.3%	63.1%	63.1%	64.8%
Reading	85%	67.7%	72.3%	70%	67%

*PACT is a Charter School in the northern suburbs.

Math	D	P	M	E
6th Grade	12.5	25.0	53.1	9.4

7th Grade	18.0	24.0	50.0	8.0
8th Grade	6.8	34.1	50.0	9.1

Reading	D	P	M	E
6th Grade	3.0	18.2	36.4	42.4
7th Grade	10.2	24.5	28.6	36.9
8th Grade	9.1	13.6	54.5	22.7

Clearly, NLA met target goals in reading but not in math.

2007-08 Academic Goals

Middle School Goals

Academic Goal 1: By spring 2008 25% of continuously enrolled NLA grade 6,7,8 students will exceed standards on the math MCA II.

Goal was not met. NLA initiated the following responses:

Begin Everyday Math in grades 5/6 2008-09

Budgeted to build on Everyday Math / Chicago Math grades 7+ as
Is fiscally possible

Supplement existing math texts old during interim period 2008-09

Restructured administrative responsibilities to allow Director a stronger
role in curriculum development and monitoring

Pilot Study Island 2008-09

Academic Goal 2: By spring 2008 25% of continuously enrolled NLA grade 6,7,8 students will exceed standards on the reading MCA II.

Goal was met overall. Grades 6/7 well above target, grade 8 slightly below.

Response:

Continue Accelerated Reader program

Separate grades 8 and 9 for language arts

Non-academic Goal 1: NLA will investigate existing restorative justice programs for possible implementation in the 2008-09 school year.

Evaluation: Contact a minimum of three organizations and two schools supporting and or/or using a restorative justice or similar program.

Organizations contacted:

- Forest Lake Youth Service Bureau
- University of MN Center for Restorative Justice and Peacemaking
- Conflict Resolution Minnesota
- Mound Park Academy
- School Mediation Center

On the recommendation of the Parent advisory Group, the staff tabled further investigation and possible program pilot until the school has completed an additional year of expansion activities.

Non-academic Goal 2: NLA will finalize a decision regarding if and how to expand to include a college preparatory high school.

Evaluation: Formation of leadership team, presentation to parent group, initial discussions with MDE sponsor, Board presentation and vote.

NLA received expansion approval from MDE on 4/18/08.

2008-09 Goals

Academic Goal 1: By Spring 2009 71% of continuously enrolled students will meet or exceed math standards as measured by the MCAII tests.

Academic Goal 2: By Spring of 2009 90% of students will meet or exceed reading standards as measured by the MCAII tests.

Non-academic Goal 1: NLA will meet adjusted enrollment projections for SY 2008-09.

Non-academic Goal 2: 80% of Parents will report satisfaction with a challenging academic program and a positive school climate in an end of the year survey.

Academic Goal 2:

Non-academic Goal 1:

Non-academic Goal 2:

