

North Lakes Charter Academy  
Annual Report  
SY 2006-07

## **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 serves students in grades six through nine. 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.

NLA provides experiential courses that are 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.

## **Mission**

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.

## **Sponsor Information**

The Minnesota Department of Education sponsors North Lakes Academy and has since its inception. Annual reports are filed with the sponsor as well as copies of all board minutes and bi-weekly newsletters. A representative visits NLA at least annually to review the annual report and file an on-site observation report. 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  
One voting non-elected director  
One non-elected .5-vote business manager

Board elections have been held annually in February. (Board action in 2007 has moved them to November to coincide with conferences beginning fall, 2007.) Nominations are accepted in January (October beginning 2007) and candidates are introduced at the annual meeting that month. Variable term lengths require the election of one or more positions each year. The chair is elected by and from the board for the length of his or her term.

The only changes in Board composition during the 2006-07 school year occurred as a result of regularly scheduled elections and are noted below. While there is nothing in the by-laws regarding repeat terms, typically teacher board members choose to remain on the board for one term and not seek re-election for the following term. An individual will perhaps then run again when a seat is open in a subsequent year. As expressed by the teaching staff this allows teachers to rotate board responsibilities and ownership of policies and programs.

### **North Lakes Academy Board**

**Jackie Saunders** (Non-voting)  
26237 Flint Ct  
PO 576  
Wyoming, MN 55092  
Home phone: 651-462-5229  
*Founding Board Member*  
*School Director, non-elected member*

**Joy Carlson**  
24886 Greenway Ave.  
Forest Lake, MN 55025  
Home phone: 651-464-3847  
*Board Chairperson*  
*Communications Director / Parent*

**Michael Bast**  
5660 E River Road  
Fridley, MN 55432  
Home Phone: 651-210-4842  
*Board member*  
*Teacher*

**Cheryl Jensen**  
26939 Forest Blvd  
Wyoming, MN 55092  
Home phone: 651-462-3853  
*Board member*  
*Parent*

**Caroline Little**  
309 Saratoga Street South  
St. Paul, MN. 55105  
651-699-5779  
*Board secretary*  
*Teacher*

**Jeff Rapp**  
718 Cascade Street North  
Osceola, WI 54020  
715-755-3730  
*Board member*  
*Teacher*

**Jim Carter**  
1231 South Shore Drive  
Forest Lake, MN. 55025  
651-464-2863  
*Board member*  
*Teacher*

**Jan Jensen** (Non-voting)  
2173 103rd Ave. North West  
Coon Rapids, MN. 55433  
763-757-7533  
Business manager

**Paula Nystrom**  
10712 Redwood Street  
Coon Rapids, MN. 55433  
763-754-5964  
Board member  
Teacher  
Elected February 2006

**Kerry Huset**

13583 Chisago Blvd.  
Lindstrom, MN. 55045  
651-257-5065

*Board member*

*Teacher*

*Term began February 2007*

**Lorrie Kuha**

Forest Lake, MN. 55025  
651-464-4728

*Board member*

*Parent*

*Term ended February 2007*

**Lisa Iverson**

25675 Goodwin Rd.  
Wyoming, MN. 55092  
651-462-4982

*Vice chair*

*Parent*

***Sandy Engelbert-Johnson***

59 Glen Edge Rd.  
Dellwood, MN 55110

*Board member*

*Member at large*

*Term began February 2007*

**Joel Erickson**

25832 Goodview  
Wyoming, MN 55092

*Board member*

*Parent*

*Term began February 2007*

**Staff**

NLA has a high staff retention rate. Thirteen of the twenty member instructional staff (includes three para-professionals) of 06-07 were original founders, four were in their third year at NLA. One new grade 6/7 science teacher was hired as well as one SPED instructor. Both filled open positions caused by a resignation.

<b>Name</b>	<b>Folder #</b>	<b>Area</b>
Michael P. Bast	388902	Social Studies (7-12)
James Carter	418154	Specific learning Disabilities
Terrance D. Darwin	242675	Social Studies (7-12) Drivers Education Coaching
Laura A. DeVillar	388150	Elementary Education Spanish
David Engen	999354	Mathematics
Dianne Abrams	356365	Elementary Education Special Education (EBD, LD, Mild to Moderate Mentally Handicapped) (K-12)
Kerry L. Huset	301146	Coaching (7-12), Physical Education (7-12)
Patricia M. Johnson	195694	English/Language Arts (Middle School 7-12)
Daniel Mendenhall	411960	Elementary Ed, Science 5-8
Paula J. Nystrom	263530	English/Language Arts Secondary Development Reading, Social Studies (7-12)
David E. Montes	389596	Mathematics, Spanish (Middle School)
Jacquelyn Saunders	219168	Administrator, Journalism, English/Language Arts

(7-12)

Caroline Little	357703	Elementary Education
Jeff Rapp		Instrumental/Classroom Music /Band (K-12)
Joelle O'Keefe	383297	Visual Arts K-12
Angela Sampson	396556	Life Sciences 7-12
Lean Kicker	412337	Communication arts/literature

### **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

### **Program Challenges**

Certain aspects of enrollment continued to provide challenges in 2006-07. 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 190 regardless of efforts at communication, publicity, etc. The 2006-07 enrollment average was 182.

Our anecdotal analysis would indicate that there are two major factors in perpetuating this challenge. One appears to be due to NLA being 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.

The obvious solution to this challenge is to seriously consider opening a “sister” high school or adding a grade a year until NLA becomes grades 6/7 through twelve. Further thoughts regarding this response can be found in the goals section of this document. In 2007 the Board voted to officially authorize the exploration of expanding NLA to include both a middle and high school.

The Director contacted Century College and explorations of options have begun regarding a collaboration. 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 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.

Our response to this challenge could dovetail with the first potential solution. Were the 6-12 solution prove to be viable, the expanded school could consider a college prep, IB, AP focus. These existing programs are consistent with our original mission of rigorous liberal arts curriculum and are readily recognizable as such to the general public.

In 2006-07 NLA responded to this challenge in a number of ways. Additional advertising was purchased in alternate local newspapers. The most effective appears to be in a local Shopper, yielding six contacts and five enrollments. North Lakes also hired Doc Savage Productions to produce a CD / DVD to be offered at tours and to local organizations such as the Rotary. Each NLA family was asked to offer the video to one family who might be a good match for enrollment at North Lakes. Evaluation of this strategy will be published in the 2007-08 report as enrollment and retention statistics.

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. To date this has not been a major issue, but with the inception of the science and social studies testing the issue will come to the forefront.

## Accountability Data

2006-07 A

Academic Goals:

To exceed MCAI target proficiency in reading

To exceed MCAI target proficiency in math.

Both goals were achieved.

The All Student index rate target in reading was 52.74, the actual index rate earned was 73.23.

The only two sub populations which met size requirements for analysis were SPED and FRP. Those sub scores were:

SPED target = 52.07	actual = 63.79
FRP target = 51.28	actual = 72.00

The All Student index rate target in math was 59.91, the actual index rate achieved was 80.56.

The only two sub populations which met size requirements for analysis were SPED and FRP. Those sub scores were:

SPED target = 45.64	actual = 58.33
FRP target = 44.63	actual = 59.62

North Lakes also administers the NWEA tests fall and spring. These tests are used less for assessing how the school as a whole is doing and more for gathering programming information for individuals and small groups of students.

That being said, in general the school wide reading scores are consistent with the MCAI results in that all grade levels achieved a mean growth from fall to spring that exceeded the mean growth targets. Largest gains were made in grade 7.

The math information was not as consistent, however. Mean growth targets were not met at any grade with a significant gap at grade 8. These results will be analyzed with the help of MDE in its workshops for MDE sponsored schools and goals will be developed accordingly.

**Non-academic Goal # 1:** NLA will modify and improve its advisory system.  
**Non-academic goal # 2:** NLA staff will expand and systematize the existing assignment completion program.

NLA implemented a combined thirty minute advisory / homework completion period mid day for all grades. During that period students were encouraged to check teacher's assignment pages on the website and enter the information into their assignment notebooks. No passes were issued during this period except to classrooms of teachers who could help a particular student with homework form that class. Teachers checked student planners for accuracy and helped students check their own Centerpoint Gradepoint scores weekly.

The advisory portion of the program had specific curriculum designed to promote character development at each level. Grades 6/7 adopted *Learning For Life* by The Boy Scouts of America. Grades 8/9 adopted *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* by Sean Covey.

After the one-year pilot it was determined in spring of 2007 that the objectives of improved homework completion and character instruction were well met at grades 6/7. Student grades, records of positive school / home interactions and written student evaluations indicate that the curriculum remained in the student's vocabulary, could be accessed in problem solving situations and was supported by parents. The program should continue into the next year.

Grade 8/9 students, however, clearly did not find the advisory sessions helpful. They expressed themselves through conversations with teachers, written letters to the director and their own restless behavior during advisory periods. There was no noticeable effect on student behavior, problem solving or achievement. The program should be dropped or seriously modified at grades 8/9.

### **2007-08 Academic Goals**

North Lakes respectfully requests that we be allowed to refine the goals for 2007-08 after completing the MDE data workshops. In the meantime, our best educated guess is we should continue to set goals that address Proficiency standards in math and reading, but add ones to address the number of students who exceed proficiency. (Or perhaps this would be better addressed using NWEA data.)

**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 school supporting and or/or using a restorative justice or similar program.

Present findings to parent group, student council, Board.

**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.



