

North Lakes Charter Academy  
Annual Report  
SY 2005-06

## **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 an additional twice yearly as needed for specific students.

### **1. 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.

### **2. 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.

### **3. 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 are held annually in February. Nominations are accepted in January and candidates 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 2005-06 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**

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*  
*Term began February 2006*

**Jim Carter**  
1231 South Shore Drive  
Forest Lake, MN. 55025  
651-464-2863  
*Board member*  
*Teacher*  
*Term began February 2006*

**Jan Jensen**  
2173 103rd Ave. North West  
Coon Rapids, MN. 55433  
763-757-7533  
Business manager  
One half board vote

**Michael Bast**  
5660 East River Road # 314  
Fridley, MN. 55431  
651-210-4842

**Paula Nystrom**  
10712 Redwood Street

Coon Rapids, MN. 55433  
763-754-5964  
Board member  
Teacher  
Elected February 2006

**Charles Knutson**  
7940 245th Ave. North East  
Stacy, MN. 55079  
651-462-4515  
*Board member*  
*Parent*  
*Term ended February 2006*

**Dave Engen**  
5801 Railroad Blvd.  
Wyoming, MN. 55092  
651-462-3210  
*Board Treasurer*  
*Teacher*  
*Term ended February 2006*

**Kerry Huset**  
13583 Chisago Blvd.  
Lindstrom, MN. 55045  
651-257-5065  
*Board member*  
*Teacher*  
*Term ended February 2006*

**Lorrie Kuha**  
Forest Lake, MN. 55025  
651-464-4728  
*Board member*  
*Parent*  
*Elected February 2006*

**Lisa Iverson**  
25675 Goodwin Rd.  
Wyoming, MN. 55092  
651-462-4982  
*Vice chair*  
*Parent*

*Elected February 2006*

#### **4. Staff**

NLA has a high staff retention rate. Thirteen of the twenty member instructional staff (includes three para-professionals) of 05-06 were original founders, four were in their third year at NLA and three were new hires. Two of the new teachers were replacing resignations; one filled a newly created position.

Josh Miller chose not to renew his contract as his wife accepted a position in Northern Minnesota and Dana Flanders accepted a SPED position in the Centennial School District.

<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. DelVillar	388150	Elementary Education Spanish
David Engen	999354	Mathematics
Dana J. Flanders-Terman	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 Menden	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 Sanberg	383297	Visual Arts K-12
Angela Sampson	396556	Life Sciences 7-12
Lean Kicker	412337	Communication arts/literature

## 5. Student Background-Demographics

### 6. Student Participation

Information to be pulled from MDE data as instructed.

### 7. Program Successes and Best Practice

North Lakes has a number of particularly strong programs. One is 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 per year
Peer Counseling	During school
Theater	After school
4H club	After school

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

## 8. Program Challenges

Certain aspects of enrollment continued to provide challenges in 2005-06. 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.

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.

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.

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.

## 9. Accountability Data

Academic Goals:

To exceed target proficiency in reading  
To exceed target proficiency in math.

Specifics of state MCAII testing are not available at the time of this report. We do have the following general data:

In all categories large enough to be tested NLA students scored above target.

Math all students category

Index target = 53.37

Index rate = 64.96

Math free / reduced lunch category

Index target = 47.34

Index rate = 60.29

Reading all students

Index target = 60.82

Index rate = 68.25

Reading free / reduced lunch

Index target = 54.52

Index rate = 60.29

Attendance rates were targeted at 90.00 and achieved at 94.79

NLA piloted NWEA testing during the 2005-2006 school year. While the pilot process yielded much helpful information regarding how to collect useful data for the upcoming year, no useful data came from the pilot regarding student achievement. Due to the nature of the training and technological challenges presented during the pilot, the sample of students who were assessed under acceptable testing circumstances was not large enough to be statistically significant in any category.

As North Lakes has a solid history of annual pre and post testing, it is anticipated that this is a one time only circumstance. NWEA testing for fall 2006 will begin October 3<sup>rd</sup>, and as all “glitches” from the 2005-06 pilot were resolved during the summer of 2006, relevant data will be available for the next report.

**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.

Five teachers attended the national Middle school Association conference with the express purpose of collecting Best Practice ideas to help meet these goals.

As a result, North Lakes reinstated a once weekly advisory program. This program has 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.

In addition, a Homework Completion period of 25 minutes was added to the schedule. This is not a study hall. Instead, each teacher checks student planners to make sure they accurately reflect the Homework Board entries posted by all teachers on all computers. This, coupled with parent access to teacher grade books through Centerpoint, strengthens home / school communication in a major way

It should be noted that while curriculum is aligned with state standards, North Lakes does not always offer intense instruction regarding a particular topic in science and social studies in the grade level year delineated by the state. NLA

combines traditional “grades” six / seven into a two year middle school program. “Grades” 8/9 are combined into a two-year upper school program which offers a curriculum at a high school level of rigor using a middle school instructional approach.

This means, for example, that chemistry is offered once during the two years upper school cycle.

NLA’s general goal is to have each student demonstrate one year of progress in the areas of language arts and reading, math, social studies, phy ed and health, Spanish, science, arts and music. This year theater was added to the curriculum for all students. Growth in language arts, reading and math is measured by administering standardized, nationally normed tests twice yearly. Progress in all other areas is measured using the portfolio technique of comparing projects and performances to assess growth over time. Internally standardized rubrics are applied to portfolio samples.

The original charter additionally requires two specific academic goals and two nonacademic goals each year.

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## 10. 2006-07 Academic Goals

**Academic Goal # 1:** Ninety two percent of NLA students will improve one or more grade levels of achievement in reading as measured by NWEA.

**Academic Goal # 2:** Ninety two percent of students will improve one or more grade levels in math as measured by NWEA.

## 11. 2006-07 Non-academic Goal

**Non-academic goal # 1:** NLA will enhance opportunities for the top five percent of students (as determined by ability and achievement measures).

**Non-academic goal # 2** NLA will analyze data in the current best practice discussions regarding the effectiveness of homework in improving student learning and will maintain or adjust homework policies accordingly.

12. NLA has a strong parent support network. The annual meeting is well attended, parents frequently drop in to hallways and classes. Spring