

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.

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 []-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
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Home phone: 651.462.5229
Founding Board Member
School Director, non-elected member

Joy Carlson
24886 Greenway Ave.
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Home phone: 651.464.3847
Board Chairperson
Communications Director / Parent

Michael Bast
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Home Phone: 651-210-4842
Board member
Teacher

Cheryl Jensen
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Board member

Parent

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2005 - _____

Charles Knutson
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Stacy, MN. 55079
651-462-4515

Shelly Vadnais till Feb 2005
26175 Glen Oak Drive
Wyoming, MN. 55092
651-462-4857

Dave Engen

Ann Rader till Feb, 2005

5801 Railroad Blvd.
Board Members 2006
Wyoming, MN. 55092
651-462-3210

7920 243rd LN. North East
Stacy, MN. 55079
651-462-5401

Kerry Huset
13583 Chisago Blvd.
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Tim Kolberg till 2005
432 4th Ave South
South St. Paul, MN. 55075
651-686-0899

Barb Olson till Feb. 2005
16800 Vassae Street
Forest Lake, MN. 55025 651-464-8388

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 Dlanders accepted a SPED position in the Centennial School District.

Name	Folder #	Area
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
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)
Joshua Miller	408651	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

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 hold out 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 preparatory, 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.

8.

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 3rd, 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 it's 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 reinstituted 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 gradebooks through Centerpoint, strengthens home / school communication in a major way

continues to be a challenge at North Lakes. NLA offers a rigorous liberal arts curriculum including math, science, language arts, social studies, visual arts,

music (band and choir) and foreign language. Technology skills are seamlessly integrated into course work.

The school relies heavily on virtual libraries and internet access. The school is also in walking distance to the local library and accesses that facility as well. The curriculum is a middle school version of a college liberal arts program. NLA has adopted the National Middle School Association guidelines for curriculum and instruction and aligns curriculum with state standards.

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 year 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.

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.

Student Enrollment Characteristics

Number of Students Enrolled

Grade	2001-2002	2002-2003	2003-2004	2004-2005
6	28	43	32	39
7	41	39	53	51
8	41	40	40	61
9	40	43	32	46

Feeder and “Graduate” Schools

Grade Level(s)	Currently Enrolled	On Waiting List	From Public Schools	From Private Schools	From Home Schools
6	32	0	30	2	0
7	53	12	46	2	5
8	40	5	35	2	3
9	32	0	30	1	1

Key Demographic trends

	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05
Male	68	75	85	
Female	79	90	100	
Special Education	13	19	20	
African American	1	1	1	
Latino	1	1	0	
Asian/Pac Islander	2	0	1	
White	145	163		
American Indian	0	0	0	
F/R Lunch	13	17	7	
LEP	1	1	0	

Mobility

	03-04			04-05				
	Number enrolled Oct. 1	Number enrolled after Oct. 1	Number transferred out after Oct. 1	Number enrolled End of School	Number enrolled Oct. 1	Number enrolled after Oct. 1	Number transferred out after Oct. 1	Number enrolled end of school
K								
1								
2								
3								
4								
5								
6	32	1	1	32	39			
7	53	1	0	54	51			
8	39	1	1	39	61			
9	32	0	2	30	46			
10								
11								
12								

The high number of grade six students enrolled in SY 2002-03 was likely a result of highly publicized boundary changes and increasing class size in grade six classrooms in the districts surrounding North Lakes. As the local schools have K-6 elementary schools and 7-9 junior high schools, it unlikely that grade six will fill at that rate in more typical years. The resulting shifts in grade level numbers reflect this one time influx, indicating NLA has a relatively stable student population.

The 04-05 enrollment numbers reflect late September enrollment and are included to allow the 03-04 numbers to be placed in context. NLA has added an addition and future enrollment will cap around 200.

Staff

NLA has a high staff retention rate. Only three teachers have chosen to move to other positions in the seven year history of the school.

Name	Folder #	Area
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Jackie Saunders
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Founding Board Member
School Director, non-elected member

Anna Beyer Maakestad
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Home phone: 651-
Board Member, Secretary
Term expires 2005 (on board since 2001)

Timothy Francis Kolberg
790 Ridge Place
Mendota Heights, MN 55118
Home phone: 651.686.0899
Board Member

Term expires 2006 (on board since 2000)

Joy Nannette B. Carlson
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Board Member

Shelley Lea Vadnais
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Wyoming, MN. 55092
Home Phone: 651-462-4857
Board Member
Re-elected February 2004

Charles A. Knutson
7940 245th Ave. NE
Stacy, MN 55079
Home phone: 651-462-4515
Board Member
Term expires 2006

Michael Bast
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Fridley, MN 55432
Home Phone: 651-210-4842
Board member

Anne Roeder
7920 243rd Lane NE
Stacy, MN 55079
Home phone: 651-462-5401

Board Member

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

Accountability

NLA employs a multi-dimensional assessment model that includes standardized tests, state assessments, performance portfolios and satisfaction surveys. Various combinations and test times have been piloted to determine which yield most useful information about individual student achievement and program success.

The chart below, together with the portfolio assessments, indicate the battery adopted through Spring 2005.

<u>Name of Assessment</u>	<u>Purpose</u>	<u>Administered</u>
Terra Nova	Assess individual progress Curriculum planning	Fall / Spring
Basic Skills	Individual student skill mastery School wide achievement	February
MCA	Individual student mastery School wide achievement	January
STAR Reading	Individual student baseline data Curriculum planning	Fall

All new students take the STAR Reading assessment and the Terra Nova tests. This would include all incoming grade six students the fall of their entry, as well as those students transferring to North Lakes in grades 7,8,or 9. New students audition for placement in the three different band levels.

Accountability Data

In addition to the general goal of one year's progress in all academic areas (as mentioned in the Instructional Focus section), the staff of North Lakes adopted two specific academic and two specific non-academic goals for the 003-004 school year.

Academic Goal #1: Students in all grade levels will continue to improve overall math skills at least one grade level as measured by the Terra Nova tests.

Average NCE

	Spring 2004	Spring 2005	Increase
Grade 7			
Grade 8			
Grade 9			

As an "increase" of zero is considered one year's growth, NLA clearly exceeded this goal. The program will continue as is, with only minor adjustments.

Program Successes

All populations of learners, without regard to previously assessed ability or achievement, continue to score, overall, significantly higher than equivalent populations when comparing nationally standardized test scores in math, reading and language. The exception is grades 8/9 language and reading, where scores were above average, but not as significantly so as the previous grades. This is hypothesized to be due to the time limitations described in the section referencing Academic Goal # 2 and has been corrected for the future.

Terra Nova/Reading

	Basic Understanding	Analyzing Text	Evaluating Meaning	Identify Reading Strategies
Grade 6	+16 Significantly above average	+14 Significantly above average	+17 Significantly above average	+14 Significantly above average
Grade 7	+11 Significantly above average	+11 Significantly above average	+12 Significantly above average	+11 Significantly above average
Grade 8	+0 Average	+03 Slightly above average	+03 Slightly above average	+02 Slightly above average
Grade 9	+08 Above average	+08 Above average	+06 Above average	+10 Above average

Terra Nova/ Math

	Number & Number Relations	Comp; & Estimation	Measurement	Geometry & Spatial	Data, Stats, & Problem S	Patterns, Functions, Algebra	Prob Solving/ Reasoning
6th Grade	+07 Slightly above average	+03 Slightly above average	+09 Above average	+11 Significantly above average	+07 Above average	+10 Above average	+10 Above average
7th Grade	+09 Above average	+05 Above average	+14 Significantly above	+11 Significantly above	+15 Significantly above	+10 Above average	+12 Significantly above

			average	average	above average		above average
8th Grade	+14 Significantly above average	+14 Significantly above average	+15 Significantly above average	+09 Above average	+10 Above average	+08 Above average	+07 Above average
9th Grade	+21 Significantly above average	+16 Significantly above average	+19 Significantly above average	+16 Significantly above average	+20 Significantly above average	+17 Significantly above average	+19 Significantly above average

Terra Nova/ Language

	Sentence Structure	Writing Strategies	Editing Skills
6th Grade	+14 Significantly above average	+15 Significantly above average	+13 Significantly above average
7th Grade	+10 Significantly above average	+12 Significantly above average	+11 Significantly above average
8th Grade	+00 Average	+01 Slightly above average	+01 Slightly above average
9th Grade	+03 Slightly above average	+03 Slightly above average	+03 Slightly above average

North Lakes also continues to receive high marks, using survey results and anecdotal evidence, for providing a positive learning environment with high standards of behavior and academic achievement for all students.

Program Problems

Due to the small size of the cohorts, it is a continual challenge to gather meaningful data regarding student achievement in academic areas. Frequently, what appears to be a trend turns out to be a specific, sometimes temporary, set of circumstances for a small sub-group of students in that cohort. Therefore, NLA continues to take a multi-dimensional approach to assessment. (See page 10) To do this in a cost efficient and time efficient manner is an ongoing challenge.

The multi grade approach to curriculum design also produces an assessment challenge. Because NLA combines grades 6/7 and grades 8/9 for all curriculums except math and Spanish, it is difficult to align assessment instruments with curriculum. For example, geography is the 6/7 social studies curriculum one year, American history the curriculum the following year. Almost all assessment instruments, however, assume a separate set of skills and information is offered to each grade level each year

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Unique Characteristics

North Lakes has a very strong sense of community. Parents are solidly involved, especially for a middle school. Student and staff turnover is low, attendance is high. A number of families have postponed moves to other communities until their children have completed ninth grade.

These strong community ties were developed by design. One of the major factors in this success was the adoption of the NLA Code of Conduct: *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 person, whether student, teacher or parent, 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.

Extracurricular Activities

Extracurricular activities are often hard to come by in a small, economically challenged school. Due to the volunteer efforts of parents and the donation of non-paid time by staff, NLA is able to offer the following choices:

<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

Most sports participation after school with neighboring school district.

* Led by teachers without additional compensation.

** Led by parent volunteers.

2006-07 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.

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 controversy over the effectiveness of homework in improving student learning and will maintain or adjust homework policies accordingly.