



# 2006-2007 ANNUAL REPORT

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Mission Statement: The North Central Charter Essential School is a public school where students are known personally, challenged intellectually, and expected to participate actively in their learning. Guided by its commitment to diversity and inclusiveness, the school seeks to send graduates into the world who THINK for themselves, CARE about others, and ACT creatively and responsibly.

## Executive Summary

*“How do you plan to hold the faculty and staff accountable to the goals we have set?” “Will you support a collaborative decision making structure?” “How do you treat students?” “I came to this school because of bullying at my high school; while I feel very safe and comfortable here at NCCES, I am not sure I am being challenged academically. How will you make sure that students like me are pushed to do their best?” “Do you believe in Charter Schools?” “Is it important for the Executive Director to know the students?” “How will you connect us to the community?” “How will your experiences in non-profit management translate to running a school?” “Do you understand what it means to be an essential school?” “What experiences do you have working with diverse populations?” “How will you make sure we continue to be an essential school?” “How will you make sure teachers are supported and students are learning?”*

These were some of the many essential questions posed to me as a candidate for Executive Director at NCCES over two separate interviews with the school search committee, an informal site visit and a full day at school during which I met with almost 1/3 of the student body (more wanted to meet with me but the process could only accommodate 20 students at a time); all 40 teachers; and a number of parents who came to school early that day to participate in my interview. Others greeted me in the parking lot at the end of the day.

I was at a point in my life and career where I felt ready to make a direct and lasting contribution to the children and families in the community in which I live. My passion for education and my experiences as a leader in two education oriented non-profits guided me towards the pursuit of a leadership opportunity in a public school in Central Massachusetts. But I wasn't sure I would be able to find a school I could believe in and embrace as my own. I found that school here at North Central Charter Essential School.

It has been exhilarating to meet with so many passionate and committed students, parents and staff at NCCES. Parents are passionate, present, and engaged as members of the staff team, as volunteers and loyal supporters of a school they feel is very much theirs. Students are proud of their school, want to be challenged, listened to and respected as individuals and learners. The faculty cares deeply about their work and is looking for a strong leadership team to support them and engage them in improving their game in the classroom. North Central Charter Essential School chose me and, more importantly, convinced me that North Central Charter Essential School was the place I needed to be.

North Central Charter Essential School is a remarkable place, built on a foundation of committed parents, teachers, staff and students who refused to allow their school to lose sight of its mission during a year of intense internal and external scrutiny. In this past year NCCES founders, students, faculty and board took a hard look at the state of the school and rather than turn a deaf ear to critique, school leaders chose to take action and make the changes necessary to ensure that NCCES could grow and thrive to meet its mission of sending its graduates into the world with the ability to think for themselves, care about others, and act creatively and responsibly.

As a new member of this community and a resident of one of the 25 towns that send students to NCCES, I am excited to embark on this next critical phase of growth at North Central Charter Essential School and am grateful to the board, staff, parents and students who chose me to lead this work.

Stephanie Davolos Harden  
Executive Director

## Letter from Chair of the Board of Trustees

David Driscoll, Commissioner of Education  
Massachusetts Department of Education  
350 Main Street  
Malden, MA 02148-5023

Dear Commissioner Driscoll:

I am happy to report that North Central Charter Essential School has successfully met the Board of Education's requirements for Charter Renewal and embarks on this next five years of growth with a strong and committed board of directors, a new leadership team focused on student achievement and instructional leadership, and a faculty and student body who continue to choose North Central Charter Essential School as their place to learn and grow.

Our first five years were marked with creatively meeting the challenges of bringing a new school to life in a community relatively un-familiar with the Charter School movement. The hard work of the schools' founding team built many of the foundations that are still in place today.

These foundations include:

- A school situated in a state of the art facility designed for the school in a restored shoe factory in one of Fitchburg's economic empowerment zones, the Cleghorn Neighborhood.
- A diverse student body with a mix of urban and rural students coming to school each day from 25 cities and small towns across North Central Massachusetts.
- A core group of founding teachers committed to transforming the life trajectories of its students and their families.
- A commitment to the schools' founding charter and the ten common principals of the Essential School movement.
- A caring and supportive "safe-school" culture that sets the tone for learning and achievement.

In the fall, founding Executive Director, Peter Garbus announced his plan to leave his position at the end of the 2006-2007 school year in order to pursue work more closely aligned with his passion for teaching and learning. Shortly thereafter the tenure of a newly hired principal became short-lived due to differences in philosophy of education that inhibited the school's academic progress. The Board received letters of resignation from three board members and the principal (whose employment was formally terminated mid-year) before the second semester. Although the NCCES community's strong commitment to the school's mission enabled the school to withstand this turmoil, the intense focus on moving the school forward in addressing its priorities for student and organizational success was interrupted by the need to navigate these difficult circumstances.

In January of 2007, the school's Director of Students Services and a founding NCCES staff member and parent, Ms. Tricia May, was appointed Acting Principal. With a focus on the priority of improving achievement for all students, the school reviewed and synthesized external and internal evaluations, surveys, and reports to identify greatest, immediate priorities. Additionally, focus groups were held to elicit additional, timely feedback from various

stakeholders including students, staff and parents. In early Spring of 2007, NCCES administration developed the *NCCES Action Plan for Academic Improvement*, a document resulting from the synthesis of historical assessments and evaluations of NCCES, outlined priority goals (and accompanying action steps) that, when realized, would result in improved student academic achievement. These goals have guided the most recent school improvement work done in the spring of 2007.

After a nationwide search lasting close to five months, NCCES selected Stephanie Harden and Tricia May to lead the school as Executive Director and Principal as it begins its sixth year of operation. Ms. Harden possesses the passion for education, personal qualities, and organizational skills and experience the school identified as key characteristics very early in the process. For the past fifteen years Ms. Harden, a resident of Hubbardston, has been a leader and builder of two of the most socially entrepreneurial non-profit organizations in the country, Teach For America and Citizen Schools. We are thrilled to have her join the community. As Acting Principal, Ms. May has given us a preview into the way she will conduct herself as Principal. Her selection provides valuable continuity during the change of leadership at NCCES. Her experience in education, her commitment to NCCES, her clear ideas and concrete plans for the future are a valuable resource to the school. A licensed Massachusetts High School Principal, she is a dynamic educator with 15 years experience in teaching, counseling, special education and administration. She is a founding staff member at NCCES, having served as the school counselor and director of special education when the school opened in 2002, and appointed to Director of Student Services in 2005. Prior to joining the start-up of NCCES, Ms. May worked at Fitchburg and North Middlesex High Schools. After a nation-wide search for a new Executive Director and Instructional Leader beginning in December of 2006, it is an added bonus that both of the new school leaders already have strong ties to central Massachusetts.

In my view as a founding parent of a recent NCCES graduate and Chair of the Board of Trustees, North Central Charter Essential School has done the hard work of building the school and making critical adjustments to its strategy. This challenging work has well positioned NCCES to move forward into its sixth year with a renewed commitment to student achievement, instructional leadership and accountability. This is an exciting time for the school and I am confident that the next five years will bring great success.

Sincerely,

Michael Ciota  
Chair  
Board of Trustees of North Central Charter Essential School

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## School Profile

North Central Charter Essential School is located in a renovated mill building along the Nashua River in the Cleghorn neighborhood of Fitchburg. The school's founding group, closely associated with the Francis Parker Charter Essential School, desired to address a concern that very few students from Fitchburg or Leominster, two racially and economically diverse small cities, were attending or applying to Parker. NCCES founders hoped to provide the same type of high quality learning environment to a diverse community of learners. Chartered by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in May 2001, the school opened its doors to 235 students in grades seven to nine in September, 2002 and now serves about 350 students in grades seven through twelve from more than 25 small cities and towns in central Massachusetts. The school is chartered to enroll up to 400 students in grades seven to twelve. The 42,000 square feet of leased space at the Massachusetts Innovation Center includes an art studio, science lab, library, performing art space, college and career resource center as well as an independent learning area.

### Grades and Age Levels Served

	Grade 7	Grade 8	Grade 9	Grade 10	Grade 11	Grade 12	Total
2002-03	90	75	50				215
2003-04	90	90	73	47			300
2004-05	80	80	75	50	40		325
2005-06	60	80	70	60	50	30	350
2006-07	56	69	73	60	47	39	344

The school has attracted a diverse group of students from more than 25 communities in central Massachusetts and in June 2007, NCCES graduated its second full class of graduates bringing the total number of NCCES graduates to 60.

Every student at NCCES must complete a capstone Senior Project, a culminating project in which the student demonstrates his or her ability to take on and complete a long term independent project which includes at least 40 hours of research, an application piece and a public presentation of their work. The Class of 2007 used the following Essential Questions to guide their projects:

### Senior Project Essential Questions (Class of 2007)

- *How does percussion progress and change as an art?*
- *Is innovation a part of human nature? What limits human innovation?*
- *Where do children get their anger from?*
- *How can massage help you feel better?*
- *Why are Certified Nursing Assistants important to the hospital community?*
- *Can I start a student school newspaper?*
- *What is a day in the life of a person with arteriovenous malformation like?*
- *What does it take to capture the human spirit on film?*
- *Are bullies the victims or the culprits? What happens to a person who is bullied?*
- *What is the mind process of the serial killer?*
- *In what ways does a Gay Straight Alliance affect the environment in a high school?*
- *What is the process of learning a second language?*
- *What should be known about World War II before leaving high school?*
- *Can social theater be effective in society?*

- *What are the potential benefits of stem cells in the human body?*
- *How can I create an exciting and believable fight scene without sacrificing safety?*
- *What defines success in terms of performing, directing, and designing a play?*
- *How can I manipulate metal to my purposes?*
- *How do financial and legal issues affect the development and building of a residential project?*
- *How did the first genetic morph in the ball python family occur? Can I create my own morph?*
- *How can we enhance traditional speech therapy for autistic children?*
- *Why is satire funny?*
- *What does it take to create a clothing line?*
- *How does hip-hop reflect culture?*
- *What causes the craving for non-edible items?*
- *How does North Korea's nuclear weapons program affect its place in global politics?*
- *What effects does climate change have on the earth?*
- *What does the future hold for our forests?*
- *How do middle school children with special needs learn to read?*
- *How can I improve upon the internal combustion engine?*
- *How can public schools cater to the needs of deaf children?*
- *What makes a successful comic book?*
- *Will home owners heat their homes with oil furnaces or solar panels by the next century?*

Beginning in 7<sup>th</sup> grade and continuing throughout their senior year, NCCES students are all encouraged and coached to continue their education beyond high school. The vast majority of graduates attend college yet others have chosen to pursue specialized training or enter the military. The list below illustrates the various schools and programs that have accepted NCCES students in the first two graduating classes:

**Colleges, Universities, Schools, and Educational and Service Programs  
Which Have Accepted NCCES Graduates**

American International College	Massachusetts College of Art
American University	Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts
Art Institute of Boston	MOC Nursing Assistant Program
Barry University	Mount Wachusett Community College
Becker College	Philadelphia University
Bennington College	Quinsigamond College
Boston Architectural College	Regis College
Brandeis University	St. Lawrence University
City Year (Americorps Program)	Salem State College
Clark University	School of the Museum of Fine Arts
Colby Sawyer College	Suffolk University
Columbia College	United States Air Force
Connecticut College	United States Marine Corps
Fitchburg State College	United Technical Institute
Franklin Pierce College	University of Colorado (Boulder)
High Point University	University of Kings College (Nova Scotia)
International School of Shiatsu	University of Massachusetts (Amherst)
Juniata College	University of Massachusetts (Lowell)
Lafayette College	University of Rhode Island
LaSalle University	Wentworth Institute of Technology
Lesley University	Worcester Polytechnic Institute
Marietta College	

To be successful in bringing together a diverse group of students and hold them accountable to high standards requires a thoughtful organization. Beginning in 2005, the school undertook a strategic planning process to help the school manage its development. The inclusive process involved all members of the school community and resulted in a re-affirmation of the school’s mission and the establishment of a vision of what success at the school would look like. This vision, which was re-affirmed by the board in October 2006, appears in the table below:

<b>NCCES Vision For Success</b>	
<b>Category</b>	<b>What Does Success Look Like?</b>
<b>Academic Success for All Students</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ NCCES has board-approved, clear Learning Goals for each grade level and graduation requirements which cover literacy &amp; communication, content understanding, inquiry, independence and other personal proficiencies which students will need to demonstrate in order to pass each grade level and to graduate.</li> <li>❑ NCCES school practices and after school programs address the goals that all students meet the board-approved Learning Goals, and provide further opportunities in arts education.</li> <li>❑ All students, who represent a diversity of economic, racial/ethnic, and academic backgrounds, are supported to reach their full potential as independent learners and gain a lifelong love of learning.</li> <li>❑ NCCES employs the CES structures and practices to fulfill its mission and uses quantitative and qualitative results to measure its successes with these practices.</li> <li>❑ NCCES supports its students so that at least 95% of NCCES students pass the ELA and Math MCAS by end of Junior Year and the school graduates 95% of its candidates each year all of which are prepared for college opportunities. At least 95% of NCCES graduates are placed in college, work or further education immediately following graduation.</li> </ul>
<b>Effective Leadership &amp; Management</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ Everyone in the school community is clear about a strategy for achieving its mission &amp; the Executive Director manages the people &amp; process to execute this strategy involving all community members.</li> <li>❑ Teachers, students and families know how each student is developing and how he or she can aid in the student’s development.</li> <li>❑ All NCCES Community members have a common understanding (are on the same page) regarding logistics, planning, and expectations, how things work, when things are happening, etc.</li> <li>❑ The general public in the region and other important networks know about the school, its accomplishments and how they can help the school achieve its mission.</li> <li>❑ A Board of Trustees, which reflects the diversity of the student body, effectively governs the school while modeling the culture and climate desired for the school.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ The school has a sound financial strategy which is well-supported by state tuition, grants and gifts, &amp; allocates money wisely to achieve its goals; running in the black with a 10% reserve as a safety net and with a waiting list of 20% of student body. .</li> <li>❑ The Executive Director and School Director empower everyone to develop the highest potential of staff. All staff has clearly defined job responsibilities, evaluations, and discipline/termination policies.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Students Work Hard &amp; Do The “Right Thing”</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ The school lives up to its “Think*Care*Act” motto, by all community members practicing the North Central Six (Purpose, Responsibility, Safety, Voice, Integrity and Community) everyday. By doing this all community members promote &amp; teach responsibility, foster respect, maintain dignity of one’s self and others and help each other learn and practice skills for positive social development</li> <li>❑ Establishing, maintaining &amp; restoring relationships are an essential part of the school community and community members value and respect relationships and protect the positive spirit of the community             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ All students and parents (or significant others) can explain the norms for behavior at school, and consequences for failure to live by the norms and have signed a binding contract to uphold the norms.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><b>Attracting, Training &amp; Retaining Staff</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ Because NCCES is an ideal work environment for excellent, creative teachers, at least 80% of NCCES staff invited returns to the school each year because of the enjoyable workplace and attractive benefit programs at the school. (“<i>Excellent teachers would be crazy to work anywhere else.</i>”)             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ NCCES Compensation &amp; benefits are comparable to or better than the surrounding districts</li> <li>▪ The school supports and encourages the professional growth of the staff.</li> </ul> </li> <li>❑ For each available job opening, NCCES attracts a pool of excellent teachers, committed to the principles of “Think*Care*Act” and North Central Six and who are able to work with and reflect the diversity of the school population.</li> </ul>

## Summary of educational philosophy

NCCES is a **public school open to all students from all backgrounds.** North Central Charter takes advantage of the rare mix of students from urban, suburban, and rural communities and is committed to ensuring that all students meet high standards.

This school respects students and believes in the worth and power of every single student. Students themselves are directly involved in their education, setting goals with guidance from teachers and their families and then figuring out how to reach those goals.

Most importantly, NCCES is an Essential School, part of a network of more than 1,000 schools around the country that personalize the learning environment through small student-teacher ratios and engage students' minds through project-based learning. NCCES employs the 10 Common Principles of the Coalition of Essential Schools to guide our practices.

NCCES has organized its six grade levels into three divisions, each with its own focus. As students move through the school from grade to grade, they are expected to move through these three aspects of learning.

**Division 1: FOUNDATIONS (7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades).**

Teachers and advisors acculturate students to the school, assess their skills, and begin helping them build and improve their skills, with specific focus on reading, writing, and math skills. Students' work in subject areas broadens their view of the world and deepens their understanding of important concepts.

**Division 2: INQUIRY (9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grades).**

Teachers and advisors further develop basic skills of students who need such support. Students learn how to analyze, interpret, and communicate their ideas. Students take on more complex questions and they take more responsibility for their own learning.

**Division 3: INDEPENDENCE (11<sup>th</sup> & 12<sup>th</sup> grades).**

Teachers and advisors help students get themselves ready to graduate and move on to their next stage of learning. Students take on greater autonomy in what they learn, how they learn, and how they show their learning.

**Ten Common Principles of Essential Schools**

1. *The school should focus on helping young people learn to use their minds well.*
2. *The school's goals should be simple: that each student masters a limited number of essential skills and areas of knowledge.*
3. *The school's goals should apply to all students.*
4. *Teaching and learning should be personalized to the maximum feasible extent.*
5. *The governing practical metaphor of the school should be student-as-worker. Accordingly, a prominent pedagogy will be coaching, to provoke students to learn how to learn and thus to teach themselves.*
6. *The diploma should be awarded upon a successful final demonstration of mastery for graduation.*
7. *The tone of the school should explicitly and self-consciously emphasize values of stress-free expectation, of trust, and decency. Parents should be key collaborators and vital members of the school community.*
8. *The principal and teachers should perceive themselves as generalists first and specialists second.*
9. *Resources dedicated to teaching and learning and budgets reflect these priorities.*
10. *The school should emphasize democracy and equity.*

Throughout each division there are several philosophies and practices incorporating Essential School principles to guide the work of students and teachers:

- ❑ **Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks and MCAS:** External tests and externally created standards can help a school measure itself against the larger world. We consider the English/Language Arts and Mathematics portions of the MCAS to be minimum requirements

and expect all students to pass. We are continually ensuring that our curriculum aligns with the Massachusetts frameworks.

- ❑ **Good learning requires both structure and freedom:** Each year and unit of study combines elements of structure and freedom. To learn to think hard, students need rich, significant essential knowledge about which to think. Learning happens when students are engaged. Students learn best when they pursue questions and find answers for themselves, when they actively experience the concepts they need to learn, and when they have choice and authority over what they study. The curriculum establishes enough structure to anchor the program and yet leaves enough freedom to allow teachers to create and to keep the curriculum open and relevant.
- ❑ **Interdisciplinary Learning:** The school's program integrates academic disciplines when possible. Integration helps students make connections between ideas and examples that naturally go together. In working to understand another culture, they can see a piece of literature next to an episode in history and next to an artist's work. When trying to figure out how the brain works, they can look at the chemical process of nerve connections next to the biological structure of the frontal lobe and how that relates to the field of psychology.
- ❑ **Disciplinary Learning:** Within an integrated curriculum, students will also learn the particular ways of seeing the world that define different academic disciplines. Artists and mathematicians sometimes have their own ways of seeing things and their own tools for exploring and expressing what they see. The school will work to hire teachers with a variety of disciplinary specialties that can design learning experiences that teach students essential concepts and specialized tools of the particular disciplines.
- ❑ **Essential Questions Drive and Organize the Curriculum:** In courses and units, essential questions drive what students study. Essential questions go to the heart of academic disciplines. They have no single right answer; indeed they are rich with possibilities, which is what makes them interesting. They require higher order thinking -- analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating evidence -- in order to find answers and come to understanding. They are the questions that led to "the content" in the first place. *What is community? What would it take to eliminate hunger? Is the water safe to swim in?* Students investigate questions that are worthy of exploration instead of textbooks full of all the answers. The students' job is not to fill their heads with all the information in the world. Instead it becomes their job to take on a question and build their own understanding, their own knowledge around what they discover. It is an active process.
- ❑ **Advisory: Curriculum for Identity, Leadership, and Community:** Advisory gives every student a home base. It focuses on the following topics: leadership, conflict resolution, self-exploration, community service, and planning for college and work. Advisors use their time each week to explore personal issues, to help students examine themselves and their educational experience, and lead students in activities designed to build up their personal skills. This time is important and it counts as academic time.
- ❑ **Active, Experiential, Real World Learning:** Learning expeditions take students out into the world and bring the world into the classroom. They might involve adventure and focus around the natural world, or they might involve community service and involve students in the society around them. Putting students in the middle of real experiences, focuses their attention on essential questions, sends them on expeditions, gives them real problems to figure out, and asks them to design and create and build. They must have tasks that require perseverance, fitness, craftsmanship, imagination, self-discipline and significant

achievement. Students and teachers plan the work together, building collaborative and supportive relationships. Through such real world experience, students come to know themselves and one another better. They also develop the confidence and self-esteem to be an active participant in the world around them.

- ❑ **Differentiated Instruction:** In a diverse classroom, teachers will sometimes need to allow different students to follow different paths in their work. There might be one prompt, but students could show their understanding in different ways. At times, there might be sense in forming different groups for different levels and letting those groups move ahead together. Teachers build in flexibility and individuality so those students who are at different skill levels can enter a project from different angles.
- ❑ **School-wide Habits of Mind:** In every class, indeed with nearly every process of the school, we want our students to ask the following questions as a framework for thinking.
  - Point of view -- From whose viewpoint are we hearing or seeing or reading?
  - Evidence -- How do we know this is true? What is the source and is it credible?
  - Connections -- Where have I seen this before? Or is it new?
  - Significance -- Why does it matter? So what?
  - Possibilities -- What if . . .? Are there alternatives? Suppose that ....
 As every member of the community comes to know these, the culture of the school itself begins to support such habits of mind.

### **School Day and School Year**

NCCES follows a fairly typical 180-day school calendar year. In the 2006-2007 school year, school started on August 29, 2006 and the 180<sup>th</sup> day was completed on June 14, 2007. The student's regular school day begins at 7:55 a.m. each morning and ends at 2:30 p.m. on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday and at 1:15 p.m. on Wednesday. After school activities including drama and athletics typically run until 4 p.m. or later.

### **Dissemination of Practices**

In November 2006, NCCES received a grant allowing the school to share its inquiry-based science program with other schools and the general public. Essential Science for the Future uses inquiry-based investigations to engage students to become active learners and active questioners. The grant is paying for the production and dissemination of a Teacher's Guide to Inquiry-based Science in Grades 7-12 and a summer workshop for teachers wishing to incorporate inquiry-based work into their courses. Wide ranges of students at NCCES are engaged in science. Division 3 courses such as Environmental Science and Global issues attract students who in other schools would not take science courses as well as other students who choose to take these courses while doubling up with a more intensive chemistry or physics course in the junior or senior year.

NCCES has developed a model Student Services Program whose practices have been shared with area educators, community organizations and business people. We have also shared work through the Safe and Supportive Learning Environments program.

## Student Profile

NCCES students come from twenty-five different communities and cross all socio-economic classes. Of the 344 students at the school on October 1, 2006:

- 51 (15%) are ethnic minorities
- 30 (9%) Hispanic/Latino
- 11 (3%) African-American
- 9 (3%) Asian-American
- 1 (<1%) American Indian
- 108 (31%) qualify for free or reduced lunch
- 191 (56%) are male and 153 (44%) are female
- 69 (20%) have a formal IEP and are enrolled in special education program
- No students without an IEP are enrolled in special education
- No students are classified as Limited English Proficient

Half of NCCES students come from Fitchburg and another 13% from Leominster. More than 90% of students come from eight school districts:

<u>School District</u>	<u>Percentage of NCCES student body</u>
Fitchburg	50%
Leominster	13%
North Middlesex (Townsend, Ashby, Pepperell)	8%
Winchendon	7%
Ashburnham-Westminster	5%
Gardner	3%
Templeton	3%
Lunenburg	3%

The remainder of the students in the 2006-2007 school year came from a wide area of central Massachusetts stretching from Harvard to Athol and from Holden and Rutland north to the New Hampshire border including Athol

Barre	Pepperell
Clinton	Petersham
Harvard	Phillipston
Holden	Princeton
Hubbardston	Royalston
Lancaster	Rutland
Orange	Sterling

During the 2006-2007 school year, 262 students who attended NCCES in 2005-2006 re-enrolled and 82 entered the school as new students including 56 in grades 7 and 26 new students in grades 8-10. Waiting lists formed during recruitment and emptied during the school year as some students expected did not attend and others decided to leave the school for various reasons. NCCES did not meet its enrollment target of 375 students so had less than one application per opening.

The 100 applications received for the 06-07 school year are broken out by town below:

Ashburnham – 2	Leominster -16
Ashby – 4	Lunenburg - 5
Clinton – 1	Orange - 1
Fitchburg - 36	Phillipston - 1
Gardner – 7	Royalston - 2
Groton - 2	Sterling -2
Harvard - 1	Townsend - 5
Hubbardston -6	Westminster -3
Lancaster -2	Winchendon -2

This past year was a difficult year for NCCES to recruit and retain students. The attempted change of direction in the school promoted by the former principal and some community members caused many NCCES families, even long-time committed members of the community, to question their involvement with the school. Because of these uncertainties, parents who in the past had been important recruiters for the school were not energized to promote the school. After the principal was let go, a few but very vocal supporters went to the DOE, some local members of the community and the press with allegations about the school and advocated for the school to be closed. The few supporters of the former principal withdrew their children from the school. Forty-four students left NCCES after October 1, 2006. The table below provides a breakdown of the reasons for leaving.

<b>Reason for Leaving</b>	<b>7<sup>th</sup></b>	<b>8<sup>th</sup></b>	<b>9<sup>th</sup></b>	<b>10<sup>th</sup></b>	<b>11<sup>th</sup></b>	<b>12<sup>th</sup></b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Moved</b>	1	1	2	2		1	7
<b>Choice</b>	1	10	1	2			14
<b>Choice (transfer to specialized/technical school)</b>				1	1		2
<b>Choice (Alternative Evening Program)</b>				4	1	2	7
<b>Choice (disagreement regarding academic standards)</b>			1				1
<b>Choice (disagreement regarding behavioral expectations)</b>		4	1				5
<b>Required Specialized Placement</b>		1					
<b>Expulsion</b>		1		1			2
<b>Drop-out</b>		4	1		1	2	10
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>43</b>

Second semester at NCCES brought some relief to families as a trusted long-term employee was selected to be Acting Principal and families were actively engaged in the search and school improvement processes, but uncertainty remained because of the impending departure of Peter Garbus, a founder of the school. In the self-reported intent to return for next fall, 44 students indicated they would not be returning. Each year, some students indicate they will not return but then return to school at the end of summer. As of July 24, 2007, NCCES has received record requests from about half of these students.

<b>Grade</b>	<b>Returning</b>	<b>Not Returning</b>	
<b>7<sup>th</sup></b>	50	7	
<b>8<sup>th</sup></b>	40	14	
<b>9<sup>th</sup></b>	58	11	
<b>10<sup>th</sup></b>	48	12	
<b>11<sup>th</sup></b>	45	0	
<b>12<sup>th</sup></b>	1	33 graduated	<b>Percent Returning for 07-08</b>
<b>Overall</b>	242	44 self-reported	86%
		24 records transferred	92%

### **School Climate**

NCCES is a safe learning environment. As our climate surveys have continuously shown students are known well by staff and other students and feel safe here, safe enough to take on the personal and academic risks we expect. Students are, at once, held to high expectations and provided much support. We are a community which respects each other.

The NCCES “Make It Right Approach” (MIRA) guides behavior, discipline and expectations, building social capital and a healthier community using a restorative justice approach. Any misconduct is not simply a violation of the rules of the school, but it is a violation against people and relationships at NCCES and/or the wider community. Harm done must be explored reflectively through *Conferencing* and made right through *Restorative Action*. An integral part of our MIRA program is the Peer Mediation Program. The NCCES Peer Mediation program began as a small elective in the first year of the school and in 2004 became part of the SCORE Mediation Program.

Over the last three years we have developed a close partnership with Mediation Services of North Central Massachusetts who provides the professional staffing to the peer mediation program. In the 2006-2007 school year another 20 student mediators completed the required 20 hour of training and were certified, bringing the total number of Certified Peer Mediators to more than 40. NCCES students know that when differences arise, there are many school-based resources available if help is needed. It is widely understood that the appropriate response to conflict is to talk about the issues and reach agreement with words and that peers are available to help them through the process if needed.

Even with the safe and supportive environment, occasionally students make poor choices requiring removal from the school environment. In 2006-2007, the school had 25 out-of-school suspensions, 3 expulsions and 2 exclusions. Reasons for the actions included vandalism, destruction of property, theft, possession of tobacco, alcohol, or other illegal substances, threat of physical attack and fighting. NCCES takes seriously any of these sorts of infractions and routinely notifies the Fitchburg Police when such infractions occur.

## Staff Profile

### Administrative Staff

NCCES begins its second charter period with a new leadership team in place. After a nationwide search for a replacement for Founding Executive Director, Peter Garbus, Stephanie Harden was hired in May and began work in July. Patricia May, a founding staff member and former Director of Student Services, was appointed as acting principal in January 2007 and appointed Principal in May. Math Department Chair, Lori Garnett became Director of Curriculum & Instruction and began work in June. Brenda Jones, a former assistant comptroller at a large regional school district, was hired in January to replace founding Business Manager, Chris Galica. The remainder of the administrative team remains unchanged.

Position	Name	Year Joined NCCES
Executive Director	Stephanie Harden	2007
Principal	Tricia May	2002
Director of Curriculum & Instruction	Lori Garnett	2006
Dean of Students	Casey Beaulac	2005
Business Manager	Brenda Jones	2007
Director of Technology Education	Brian Sullivan	2005
Development Director	Carolyn Sellars	2002
Facilities Coordinator	Bill Contois	2002
Registrar/Administrative Assistant	Inga Breault	2003
Bookkeeper	Maureen Therrien	2003
Administrative Assistant	Cynthia Campbell	2005
School Secretary	Millie Whitfield	2003
	Sharon Keefe	2003
Lunch Program Assistants	Diane Normadin	2005
	Michelle Mancuso	2006
Athletic Director	Jared Swerzenski	2005

### Teaching Staff

NCCES employed 36 teachers at the school in 06-07 for an overall student to teacher ratio of 1:10. The typical class size at the school is between 15 and 20 students. Although several NCCES teachers were in the early stages of their careers, others are long-time veterans with 20 and 30 years experience. In the 2006-2007 school year, the NCCES staff averaged 7.1 years of teaching experience and with an average of 2.5 years of their teaching at this school (the school is only 5 years old.) Six founding teachers remained at the school throughout the first five years.

In 2006-2007, one teacher, a participant in a teacher-training program, left the school mid-way through the year. That teacher was replaced with a long-term sub until a replacement teacher was hired. In the coming year, 28 teachers (78%) are returning and 8 (22%) are not returning. Of those not returning, six teachers (75%) were not re-hired, one moved out of state and one took another position. The return of 93% of our teachers who were offered new contracts is the best return rate in the school's history and illustrates the teachers' confidence in the new leadership at the school.

## Governance Profile

### NCCES Board of Trustees

The school is led by a diverse group of dedicated individuals committed to the school's THINK\*CARE\*ACT mission. Individuals are elected to the board through five different means:

- Appointed trustees are nominated and elected by the board
- Faculty trustees are nominated and elected by the faculty
- Family trustees are nominated and elected by families
- Student trustees are nominated and elected by students
- The Executive Director and Principal serve on the board as ex-officio members

A listing of board members and a list of actions taken by the board follow.

<b>Appointed Trustees</b>		
<b>Michael Ciota</b> <b>Attorney</b>	Chairman Governance Committee Facilities Committee elected September 2004 and June 2005 expiration June 2008	A resident of Westminster Mike was originally elected as a parent representative to the Board and then elected as a community representative. He is an attorney with offices in Fitchburg and Worcester with a specialty in municipal law. Mike holds a B.A. in Philosophy from Cathedral College in New York and his J.D. from Hofstra University School of Law.
<b>Richard Lavers, Jr</b> <b>Attorney</b>	Vice Chairman Governance Committee Facilities Committee  elected January 2004 expiration June 2008	A resident of Amherst, NH Rich is currently an Associate with the Law Offices of Erb & Erb (Leominster, MA). A native of Fitchburg with deep roots in this community, Rich brings a unique background to the board. He served in the office of State Senator Robert Antonioni for five years as the Budget Director and as the Education Committee Policy and Research Director. A graduate of Boston College and Suffolk University Law School, Rich has a BA in Political Science and a <i>Juris Doctor</i> .
<b>Kevin Howard</b> <b>Banker,</b>	Treasurer Finance Committee  Elected November 2006, expiration November 2009	Kevin is banker specializing in commercial lending at TD Banknorth. He has served on the school's Finance Committee for 3 years.
<b>David LaLiberty</b> <b>Business</b>	Acting Secretary Facilities Committee Elected January 2007 expiration January2010	A resident of Leominster, David La Liberty has a degree in Business Administration from Clark University and 20 years of experience in real estate and 15 years experience managing Corporate Information Systems and Operations.
<b>Tom Casey</b> <b>Educator</b>	Elected: January 2007 Expiration: January2010 Search Committee	A resident of Ayer, Tom Casey has more than 40 years experience as a public school educator in Massachusetts. He is a certified Principal, has served on NEASC accreditation teams, and brings a wealth of knowledge to our school. Tom has a Bachelors in Business Administration from St. Anselm College and a Masters of Education from Framingham State College.

<b>Faculty Elected Trustees</b>		
<b>Peggy Gosselin School Nurse</b>	elected October 2005, Re-elected September 2006, expiration September 2007 *resigned position June 2007	A resident of Westminster, Peggy Gosselin was previously a school nurse for the Wachusett Regional School District, and a pediatric home care nurse. She graduated from Mount Wachusett Community College and received a Bachelor's degree in Nursing from Anna Maria College.
<b>Jonathan Kinney Teacher and Counselor</b>	Elected September 2006 expiration September 2007  Search Committee	A resident of Pepperell, Jonathan Kinney has just completed his third year at NCCES where he is a School Counselor, teaches wellness and founded the Outing Club. He has more than 10 years experience as a guidance counselor, a family and mental health therapist, and as a mental health outreach worker. He has an M.S. in Adolescent and Family Therapy and is a graduate of the Coaches Training Institute and the National Outdoor Leadership School.
<b>Jennifer Spingla Teacher</b>	Elected September 2006, expiration September 2007  Search Committee	A native of Leominster and currently a resident of Ashburnham, Jen Spingla has taught science and math at NCCES for three years. Before becoming a teacher, Jen worked for several years in experiential leadership programs for young people. She received her Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Maine.
<b>Parent Elected Trustees</b>		
<b>Michael Croteau Assistant Magistrate</b>	Elected September 2006, expiration September 2007  Facilities Committee	A resident of Leominster, Michael Croteau is an Assistant Magistrate in the Leominster District Court and the guardian of a NCCES student who just completed 9 <sup>th</sup> grade.
<b>Jocelyn Deneen Sales Manager</b>	Elected September 2006, expiration September 2007  Search Committee	A resident of Hubbardston, Jocelyn Deneen is a long time employee of the Scotts Company with experience in management. She served on the Strategic Planning Steering Committee in 2005-2006. She is the parent of a NCCES student who just completed 10 <sup>th</sup> grade and who has been at the school for four years.
<b>Carolyn Sellars Development Director</b>	Elected October 2005, Re-elected: September 2006, expiration September 2007	A resident of Townsend, Carolyn Sellars is a founding staff member and a parent of a founding NCCES student who just completed 11 <sup>th</sup> grade as well as two graduates of F.W. Parker Charter Essential School. She has a B.S. from Cornell University and has worked as a management, marketing and environmental consultant as well as for several non-profits.
<b>Student Elected Trustees</b>		
<b>Jason Brown 10<sup>th</sup> Grade</b>	Elected Oct 2006, expiration September 2007	Templeton
<b>Simone Burg 9<sup>th</sup> Grade</b>	Elected Oct 2006, expiration September 2007	Fitchburg
<b>Travis Stewart 10<sup>th</sup> Grade</b>	Elected Oct 2006, expiration September 2007	Ashburnham

<b>Ex-Officio Trustees</b>		
<b>Stephanie Harden</b>	Ex-Officio, Executive Director, July 2007	A founding staff member at Citizen Schools and a Teach For America alumna, Stephanie brings over 17 years of experience in public education and non-profit management to NCCES. Stephanie earned her B.A. degree from Dickinson College and her M.Ed from Harvard Graduate School of Education and resides in Hubbardston, Massachusetts.
<b>Peter Garbus Educator</b>	Ex-Officio, Executive Director, July 2001 to June 2007	A resident of Lancaster, Peter was a member of the team who wrote the original charter application. He received a B.A. in history from Brown University and an M.Ed from the Harvard Graduate School of Education in Teaching and Curriculum and taught humanities for twelve years. He is a member of the National School Reform Faculty of the Annenberg Institute for School Reform, has National Board Certification in History/Social Studies and is a graduate of the National Outdoor Leadership School.
<b>Tricia May Educator</b>	Ex-Officio, Principal, February 2007	A founding staff member and parent of an NCCES graduate, Tricia brings over 20 years experience in youth development, school counseling and leadership. She earned her B.S. and MS degrees from Fitchburg State College and resides in Lunenburg.

**Major policy decisions made by the Board**

	<b>Decisions</b>
<b>July 2006</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Approved charter renewal application and 2007-2012 Accountability Plan</li> </ul>
<b>September 2006</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wellness Policy Approved</li> </ul>
<b>October 2006</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formally endorsed vision from strategic planning process and re-confirmed commitment to Essential School principles.</li> <li>• Accepted letter from Peter Garbus announcing his intention to resign as Executive Director at the end of FY2007</li> </ul>
<b>November 2006</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Elected Kevin Howard as community member of board of trustees for a term expiring November 2009.</li> <li>• Accepted Financial Reports for Fiscal Year 2006.</li> <li>• Approved policy on Promoting Civil Rights and Prohibiting Harassment Discrimination.</li> <li>• Did not approve motion to change the administrative structure of the school to allow principal to report directly to Board of Trustees.</li> <li>• Delegated authority to Finance Committee to make hiring decision for Business Manager as long as terms and conditions are similar to those of the outgoing Business Manager, Chris Galica</li> <li>• Established a committee to begin search for new Executive Director by first reviewing the current structure of the school to see if changes are needed.</li> </ul>

<b>December 2006</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Heard report from Executive Functions Committee and authorized Executive Functions Committee to create and publish a job announcement for a “Head School”</li> </ul>
<b>January 2007</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Elected Tom Casey and David La Liberty as community member of board of trustees for a term expiring January 2010.</li> <li>• Adopted resolution endorsing the responses to the renewal inspection report prepared by staff and commits itself to the priorities stated in the report</li> <li>• Accepted Collaborative Bargaining Agreement Proposal</li> </ul>
<b>February 2007</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Elected Kevin Howard as Treasurer of Board of Trustees</li> <li>• Appointed Brenda Jones as Business Manager</li> <li>• Appointed Tricia May as Board member based to replace Margaret DeRoo whose employment was terminated effective 2/8/07. Tricia May will be acting principal through June 30, 2007.</li> <li>• Received report on Renewal of NCCES Charter</li> </ul>
<b>March 2007</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Approved policy relating to Education of Limited English Learners</li> <li>• Approved policy relating to Placement of Homeless Students</li> </ul>
<b>April 2007</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Approved revised Accountability Plan for 2007-2012</li> </ul>
<b>May 2007</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Approved the hiring of Stephanie Harden as Executive Director to begin July 1, 2007</li> <li>• Approved FY 2008 budget</li> <li>• Elected Rich Lavers as Vice Chair with a term expiring on 6/30/08.</li> <li>• Elected David LaLiberty as Acting Secretary with term expiring 9/30/07.</li> </ul>

No charter amendments were submitted during Fiscal Year 2007. The school did submit an application for charter renewal in July 2006 and the Board of Education voted to renew the charter in February 2007.

No official complaints were received by the Board of Trustees pursuant to 601 CMR 1.10.

## Financial Profile

Financial statement for the fiscal year 2007 (**unaudited**)  
**NORTH CENTRAL REGIONAL CHARTER ESSENTIAL SCHOOL**  
**STATEMENT OF REVENUES AND EXPENSES**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED JUNE 30, 2007**

### REVENUE

State Allocation- Tuition	\$ 2,900,560.00
State Facilities Assistance	275,782.00
Government Contracts- Federal	267,403.15
Government Contracts- State	25,866.92
Private Support- Grants	193,008.07
Lunch Rev Federal + State	29,043.86
Student Fees	43,140.49
Lunch Rev - student paid	48,039.08
Interest Income	21,491.41
Other Income	25,538.59

<b>TOTAL REVENUES</b>	<b>\$ 3,829,873.57</b>
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### EXPENSES

PROFESSIONAL INSTRUCTION	\$ 2,075,017.19
CLASSROOM SUPPLIES	90,349.97
STUDENT ACTIVITIES AND PROGRAMS	53,914.47
TOTAL ADMINISTRATION	670,511.67
TOTAL TECHNOLOGY	130,913.52
TOTAL FACILITIES	876,825.03

<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>\$ 3,897,531.85</b>
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<b>SURPLUS/(DEFICIT)</b>	<b>\$ (67,658.28)</b>
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Note: The unaudited end of year 2006-2007 statement of revenues and expenses shows a loss of \$67,658. This is a non-cash loss due to the depreciation expense of capitalized leasehold improvements, computer hardware and software, furniture, and fixtures. It was a conscious decision of the school to use these funds for student learning.

**Balance sheet**  
**NORTH CENTRAL REGIONAL CHARTER ESSENTIAL SCHOOL**  
**BALANCE SHEET (UNAUDITED)**  
**June 30, 2007**

**ASSETS****CURRENT ASSETS**

Cash and Bank Accounts	\$ 882,399.19
Receivables	33,927.51
Deposits	<u>20,250.00</u>
<b>TOTAL CURRENT ASSETS</b>	<b><u>936,576.70</u></b>

**PROPERTY AND EQUIPMENT, NET** **155,970.67**

**OTHER ASSETS** **0**

**TOTAL OTHER ASSETS** **0**

**TOTAL ASSETS** **\$ 1,092,547.37**

**LIABILITIES & NET ASSETS****CURRENT LIABILITIES**

Withholding Accounts	\$ 7,442.45
Accrued Payroll	197,308.81
Accrued Expense	53,292.70
Deferred Grant Revenue	<u>14,067.86</u>
<b>TOTAL CURRENT LIABILITIES</b>	<b><u>272,111.82</u></b>

**NET ASSETS**

Operating Reserve, Beginning Balance	662,568.86
Capital Reserve, Beginning Balance	225,524.97
Operating Surplus	1,896.02
Capital (Deficit)	<u>(69,554.30)</u>
<b>TOTAL NET ASSETS</b>	<b><u>820,435.55</u></b>

**TOTAL LIABILITIES & NET ASSETS** **\$ 1,092,547.37**

## Approved school budget for Fiscal 08

	<b>FY08</b>
<b>REVENUE</b>	
State Allocation- Tuition	3,039,293
State Facilities Aid	288,660
Government Contracts- Federal	119,947
Government Contracts- State	0
Private Support- Contributions	149,500
Private Support- Grants	10,000
Lunch Rev Federal + State	29,584
Student Fees	0
Lunch Rev - student paid	42,198
Interest Income	20,000
Other Income	35,640
<b>TOTAL REVENUE</b>	<b>\$ 3,734,822</b>
 <b>ADMINISTRATION</b>	 382,888
 <b>PROFESSIONAL INSTRUCTION</b>	 2,067,302
 <b>PUPIL SERVICES</b>	 210,073
 <b>OPERATION &amp; MAINT OF PLANT</b>	 149,141
 <b>BENEFITS &amp; OTHER FIXED</b>	 925,418
 <b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	 <b>\$ 3,734,822</b>
 <b>SURPLUS/(DEFICIT)</b>	 <b>\$ 0</b>

## Progress Toward Goals in the Accountability Plan

North Central Charter Essential School received a new charter in February 2007 and the board endorsed a new Accountability Plan in April 2007. This analysis of our progress toward meeting the measures set out in the April 2007 Accountability Plan will serve as a baseline for the school as we measure our progress over the next five years;

### I. ACADEMIC SUCCESS

#### A. NCCES Students think for themselves, use their minds well and master a limited number of essential skills and areas of knowledge. (Common Principles #1 and #2)

Measure of Success	June 2007 Results
<b>1. 100% of NCCES students pass ELA and Math MCAS by graduation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 100% of graduates have passed ELA</li> <li>• 4 students (2 members of class of 2006 and 2 members of class of 2007) did not pass Math MCAS prior to graduation</li> </ul>
<b>2. NCCES makes Annual Yearly Progress each year.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MCAS has not met AYP (see table below)</li> </ul>
<b>3. 90% of students successfully meet eligibility requirements for promotion (Gateway) at the end of 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grades.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 100% of 8<sup>th</sup> grade students successfully passed the Gateway to Division 2 .</li> <li>• 97% of 10<sup>th</sup> grade students successfully passed the Gateway to Division 3.</li> </ul>
<b>4. 100% of NCCES graduates demonstrate mastery of higher order skills through successful completion of the Senior Project.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 100% of NCCES graduates successfully completed Senior Project.</li> </ul>

NCCES made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in ELA in the aggregate in 2003 and 2006. NCCES did not make AYP in ELA in the aggregate for 2004 due to missing the attendance target by 0.2%, although it exceeded the state CPI performance target; and did not make AYP in 2005. The school is currently Identified for Improvement in ELA. Over the course of the charter, the only subgroups large enough to trigger separate AYP determinations were White (all years) and Low Income students (in 2003 for both ELA and math, and in 2005 for ELA). The school made AYP in ELA for subgroups each year from 2003 through 2006. NCCES did not make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in Mathematics, in the aggregate or for subgroups, in any year from 2003 through 2006 and is currently identified for Corrective Action in Mathematics.

For Cycle IV (2005 and 2006), the school’s ELA performance rating was “High.” For math, the school received a “Very Low” performance rating. NCCES met state Competency Determination (CD) targets for its first graduating class in 2006 with 93% of students passing both the ELA and Mathematics sections of the Grade 10 MCAS exams. Table 2 (below) illustrates performance and improvement ratings based on aggregate student performance on MCAS tests.

<b>NCCES 2006 AYP Report</b>					
<i>Source: Cycle IV Accountability Report, MA Department of Education</i>					
English Language Arts					
<a href="#">Cycle IV Performance Rating:</a>	HIGH	Performance Data:	<a href="#">State Target</a>	<a href="#">Cycle IV CPI</a>	
			80.5	80.5	
<a href="#">Cycle IV Improvement Rating:</a>	NO CHANGE	Improvement Data:	<a href="#">Baseline CPI</a>	<a href="#">Gain Target</a>	<a href="#">On Target Range</a>
			82.3	3.5	83.3-88.3
<a href="#">Accountability Status:</a>	<b>Identified for Improvement</b>		<a href="#">Cycle IV AYP (Aggregate):</a>	2005	2006
-				No	Yes
Mathematics					
<a href="#">Cycle IV Performance Rating:</a>	VERY LOW	Performance Data:	<a href="#">State Target</a>	<a href="#">Cycle IV CPI</a>	
			68.7	57.5	
<a href="#">Cycle IV Improvement Rating:</a>	<b>IMPROVED BELOW TARGET</b>	Improvement Data:	<a href="#">Baseline CPI</a>	<a href="#">Gain Target</a>	<a href="#">On Target Range</a>
			54.6	9.1	61.2-66.2
<a href="#">Accountability Status:</a>	<b>Corrective Action</b>		<a href="#">Cycle IV AYP (Aggregate):</a>	2005	2006
-				No	No

**B. NCCES curriculum is aligned with standards from the MA Curriculum Frameworks and is effectively implemented in the classroom.\***

Measure of Success	June 2007 Results
<p><b>1. 100% of NCCES courses are aligned with standards from the state frameworks as indicated by curriculum maps.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>While NCCES curricula has always been aligned with state frameworks, the school is in the process of developing formal curriculum maps.</li> </ul>
<p><b>2. 100% of NCCES teachers from all subject areas adopt and ensure mastery of ELA and/or math standards from the state frameworks as measured by analysis of student progress on common formative assessments.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The adoption of ELA or Math standards in all subjects and the development of common formative assessments is work planned for the 2007-2008 year.</li> </ul>

\*The implementation of this goal is the main priority of the newly hired Director of Curriculum and Instruction.

**C. NCCES students transition successfully from NCCES to a post-secondary program of study, employment and/or an organized service program.**

Measure of Success	June 2007 Results
1. 90% of NCCES graduates are accepted to at least one post-secondary program.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>92% of NCCES graduates have been accepted to at least one post-secondary program. *</li> </ul>
2. 95% of NCCES graduates are enrolled in a post-secondary educational program, employed, and/or participating in an organized service program by the fall following graduation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>100% of the class of 2005 and 2006 were in college, employed or participating in service programs in the fall following graduation.</li> </ul>

\* Five students chose to enter the workforce directly and did not apply to any post-secondary programs. At least three of these students have expressed their intent to apply to programs in the future.

**D. NCCES students are well prepared for success in post-secondary educational programs, employment, and/or participation in an organized service program as determined by data collected from biennial alumni surveys.**

Measure of Success	June 2007 Results
1. 90% of NCCES alumni are enrolled in a post-secondary educational program, employed, and/or participating in an organized service program as determined by a biennial survey of alumni.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The first official survey of NCCES alumni is scheduled to take place during the 2007-2008 school year.</li> </ul>
2. 90% of NCCES alumni indicate that they agree or strongly agree that they are well-prepared for post-secondary educational programs, employment, and/or participation in an organized service program as determined by a biennial survey of alumni.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The first official survey of NCCES alumni is scheduled to take place during the 2007-2008 school year.*</li> </ul>

**II. ORGANIZATIONAL VIABILITY**

**A. NCCES attracts enrolls and retains students from its region.**

Measure of Success	June 2007 Results
1. NCCES maintains an enrollment level equal to or exceeding 90% capacity as defined by a yearly enrollment target as set by the Board of Trustees.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The October enrollment of 344 was 92% of the board's target of 375 and the year end enrollment of 319 was 85% of the board's target.</li> </ul>

<p><b>2. NCCES maintains a waitlist equal to or exceeding 10% of the school’s population in grades 7 through 10.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are currently openings at the school and no waiting list.</li> </ul>
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**B. NCCES fiscal management reflects sound practices that support fulfillment of its charter’s essential commitments. (Common Principle #9)**

Measure of Success	June 2007 Results
<p><b>1. NCCES has sound financial practices as evidenced by yearly independent audits which include no significant negative findings.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The 2005-2006 audit had no significant negative findings.</li> </ul>
<p><b>2. The NCCES actual and proposed annual budget is balanced, showing income equal to or greater than expense.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The unaudited end of year 2006-2007 statement of revenues and expenses shows a loss of \$67,658. This is a non-cash loss due to depreciation and represents a choice by the board to invest in the school. The fiscal 2007-2008 approved budget is balanced.</li> </ul>
<p><b>3. The NCCES Board of Trustees annually approves a balanced budget that supports the academic success of students.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The board’s budgeting process is driven by the academic needs of the students as exemplified by the board’s decision to staff both a Principal and Director of Curriculum and Instruction</li> </ul>
<p><b>4. The NCCES Board of Trustees will secure a permanent home for NCCES.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In June 2007, the board formed a Facilities Committee to define the school’s needs and identify how to best meet those needs.</li> </ul>

**C. The NCCES Board of Trustees provides sound and effective governance to support and promote the school’s mission.**

Measure of Success	June 2007 Results
<p><b>1. The NCCES Board of Trustees and the school leader develop annual leadership goals which reflect the school’s mission and lead to further implementation of the school improvement plan and 75% of these goals are met annually.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The board focused last year’s goals on NCCES’ leadership structure and was successful in restructuring the school leadership team and hiring new leaders for the school. In 2007-2008 the board will use the school accountability plan to measure NCCES’s success.</li> </ul>
<p><b>2. 75% of NCCES Board members agree or strongly agree that the Board is meeting its governance responsibilities as measured by the Board’s annual self-assessment.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The board self-assessment did not ask this question specifically. When asked to rate the board’s overall performance on a scale of 1 to 5, the response averaged 3.14.</li> </ul>

### III. FAITHFULNESS TO CHARTER

**A. NCCES students are known personally, challenged intellectually, and participate actively in their learning. (Common Principles #3, #4 & #5)**

Measure of Success	June 2007 Results
<p><b>1. 100% of NCCES students have personal learning plans which include goals for personal and intellectual growth that are developed and signed by students, parents/guardians and Advisors annually.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 100% of students who were in the school in October 2006 had personal learning goals for the year.</li> </ul>
<p><b>2. 80% of NCCES students and parents agree or strongly agree that s/he (the student) is known well and can thus be academically advised well by at least one staff member in the school as measured by the Annual Climate Survey.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 83% of respondents on Annual Climate Survey Agreed (38%) or Strongly Agreed (45%) that advisors know students well. (An additional 12% Somewhat Agreed.)</li> </ul>
<p><b>3. 80% of NCCES students and parents agree or strongly agree that they believe that their student is provided with an appropriate level of academic challenge at NCCES as measured by the Annual Climate Survey.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 71% of respondents on Annual Climate Survey Agreed (20%) or Strongly Agreed (51%) that their student is provided with an appropriate level of academic challenge. (An additional 21% Somewhat Agreed.)</li> </ul>
<p><b>4. NCCES demonstrates effective Essential School practices as evidenced by annual reviews by outside Critical Friends.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The school will be scheduling its first review by outside Critical Friends in the 2007-2008 school year.</li> </ul>

**B. NCCES is a diverse and inclusive community where every member’s voice and perspective is valued and respected. (Common Principles #3 & #10)**

Measure of Success	June 2007 Results
<p><b>1. NCCES policies, procedures, practices, and indicators of success reflect commitment to diversity and inclusiveness as indicated by findings of external and internal reviews.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NCCES work this year involved shoring up policies and practices which involved much internal review. External review included a routine Mid-Cycle Review by the Massachusetts Department of Education’s Program of Quality Assurance which provided valuable feedback and a very positive overall summary of findings.</li> </ul>
<p><b>2. Response rate for the NCCES Annual Climate Survey of staff, students and parents increases by 2% per year resulting in returns of at least 60%.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In the spring of 2007, only 27% of students, 33% of families and 10% of staff completed the survey.</li> </ul>

<p><b>3. 80% of NCCES students and parents agree or strongly agree that they personally feel safe in the NCCES learning environment as measured by the Annual Climate Survey.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>96% of respondents feel the school is Safe (62%) or Very Safe (34%)</li> </ul>																				
<p><b>4. 80% of NCCES students and staff actively participate in a clearly defined, democratic process for school-wide decision making as measured by voter participation in decisions requiring referenda.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>91% of the school community (100% of staff and 83% of students) voted in a March, 2007 use of electronic device policy?</li> </ul>																				
<p><b>5. The demographic composition of the student body reflects the diversity of the sending districts as measured by comparing NCCES with U.S. Census data.</b></p>	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>School</th> <th>Entire Region*</th> <th>Urban Part of Region*</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>White</td> <td>85%</td> <td>85%</td> <td>81%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>African-American</td> <td>3%</td> <td>2%</td> <td>3%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Asian</td> <td>3%</td> <td>2%</td> <td>3%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Hispanic or Latino</td> <td>9%</td> <td>8%</td> <td>11%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>* Source: U.S. 2000 Census Data</p>		School	Entire Region*	Urban Part of Region*	White	85%	85%	81%	African-American	3%	2%	3%	Asian	3%	2%	3%	Hispanic or Latino	9%	8%	11%
	School	Entire Region*	Urban Part of Region*																		
White	85%	85%	81%																		
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Asian	3%	2%	3%																		
Hispanic or Latino	9%	8%	11%																		

**C. NCCES shares with the outside community replicable models of effective practices.**

Measure of Success	June 2007 Results
<p><b>1. At least 5 NCCES staff shares some aspect of NCCES practices annually with educators and/or related professionals.</b></p>	<p>At least five NCCES staff shared practices with outside educators. School staff presented an Inquiry Science workshop at the charter school best practices showcase in Worcester, shared how to integrate performing arts into the curricula at the CES Fall Forum, and presented the NCCES Student Services Program model to the Mount Wachusett Human Services students. We have also shared our NCCES Crisis Response Plan with local schools and the work NCCES has done to ensure a Safe &amp; Supportive Learning Environment.</p>
<p><b>2. NCCES maintains on the school's website examples of replicable models of effective practices.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The school will begin to maintain on its website examples of replicable models during the 07-08 school year. The Inquiry Science materials are being placed on the website this summer.</li> </ul>
<p><b>3. NCCES brings in at least 25 visitors annually to observe directly the work that is going on in the school.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The school did not track officially visitors observing the school in the past but will begin in the 07-08 school year.</li> </ul>

## Summary of external standardized test results

### MCAS Results -

North Central Charter Essential School MCAS scores by year

<b>MCAS Results for Tests Used for AYP Accountability Purposes</b>						
<b>Test/Year</b>	<b>Number of students tested</b>	<b>% Advanced</b>	<b>% Proficient</b>	<b>% Needs Improvement</b>	<b>% Warning/Failed</b>	<b>CPI</b>
<b>ELA - Grade 7</b>						
2003	84	7	58	24	11	83.0
2004	84	0	52	37	11	80.1
2005	74	1	54	38	7	82.1
2006	59	3	41	47	8	75.4
<b>ELA - Grade 10</b>						
2004	45	13	44	36	7	85.0
2005	50	6	38	34	22	74.5
2006	59	5	71	17	7	88.6
<b>Math - Grade 8</b>						
2003	70	3	10	40	47	45.7
2004	86	2	20	36	42	54.1
2005	80	3	15	23	60	44.9
2006	72	0	13	38	50	47.9
<b>Math - Grade 10</b>						
2004	45	18	27	36	20	69.4
2005	50	8	42	20	30	70.2
2006	55	31	22	31	16	77.3
<b>Other MCAS Results Administered During the Charter Term</b>						
<b>Test/Year</b>	<b>Students Included</b>	<b>% Advanced</b>	<b>% Proficient</b>	<b>% Needs Improvement</b>	<b>% Warning/Failed</b>	<b>CPI</b>
<b>ELA - Grade 8</b>						
2006	75	4	59	33	4	85.0
<b>Math - Grade 7</b>						
2006	60	2	10	43	45	46.7
<b>Science and Technology - Grade 8</b>						
2003	70	0	17	50	33	NA
2004	86	3	17	42	37	NA
2005	80	0	19	44	38	NA
2006	72	0	15	47	38	54.5

The major obstacle the school has in addressing AYP is the performance of 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders on the math MCAS. An analysis of our MCAS scores indicates that we are addressing the individual needs of students who remain with the school from 8<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> grade (2 cohorts totaling 73 students). Thirty-six (36) of these students (48%) improved 14 or more points between 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade. More than half of the 73 students who have taken MCAS Math tests in both 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grades at NCCES moved up levels between the two years including:

- 2 students moved two levels up from Warning level to Proficient
- 2 students moved two levels up from Needs Improvement to Advanced
- 7 students moved from Warning to Needs Improvement
- 20 students moved from Needs Improvement to Proficient
- 7 students moved from Proficient to Advanced

Although we've seen the improvement at the 10<sup>th</sup> grade level, the school is not making AYP because of the performance on the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade students on the MCAS math test (see Tables 4 & 5.)

Category	Percent of Total at each level
<b>Low Warning</b>	3.8%
<b>High Warning</b>	43.9%
<b>Low Needs Improvement</b>	23.5%
<b>High Needs Improvement</b>	16.7%
<b>Proficient or Advanced</b>	12.1%

Table 5. NCCES Math Composite Performance Index (CPI) Comparisons by Grade (2006)

<b>Grade 7 Math</b>	46.7
<b>Grade 8 Math</b>	47.9
<b>Grade 10 Math</b>	77.3
<i>Source: Massachusetts DOE</i>	

## NCLB Report Card 2006-2007 Report Card

**North Central Charter Essential School (04740505)**

**Patricia A May, Principal**  
 Mailing Address: 1 Oak Hill Road  
 Suite 100  
 Fitchburg, MA 01420  
 Phone: (978) 345-2701  
 FAX: (978) 345-9127  
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**Overview:**

This report card contains information required by the federal No Child Left Behind Act for our school and district including: teacher qualifications; student achievement on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS); and school/district accountability.

**Mission Statement:**

North Central Charter Essential School is a public school where students are known personally, challenged intellectually, and expected to participate actively in their learning. Guided by its commitment to diversity and inclusiveness, the school seeks to send graduates into the world who think for themselves, care about others, and act creatively and responsibly.

Enrollment - 2006-07				Educator Data - 2006-07			
	School	District	State		School	District	State
<b>Total Count</b>	344	344	968,661	Total Number of Teachers	37	37	73,176
<b>Race/Ethnicity (%)</b>				Percentage of Teachers Licensed in Teaching Assignment	77.3	77.3	95.4
African American or Black	3.2	3.2	8.2	Total Number of Teachers in Core Academic Areas	34	34	60,604
Asian	2.6	2.6	4.8	Percentage of Teachers in Core Academic Subjects Who are Highly Qualified	86.5	86.5	95.1
Hispanic or Latino	8.7	8.7	13.3	Percentage of Teachers in Core Academic Subjects Who are Not Highly Qualified	13.5	13.5	4.9
Multi-race, Non-Hispanic	0.0	0.0	1.7	Student/Teacher Ratio	9.3 to 1	9.3 to 1	13.2 to 1
Native American	0.3	0.3	0.3	<b>High Poverty vs Low Poverty Schools</b>			
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0.0	0.0	0.2		<b>All Schools</b>	<b>High Poverty Schools</b>	<b>Low Poverty Schools</b>
White	85.2	85.2	71.5	Percentage of Teachers Licensed in Area in Which Teaching	77.3	-	-
<b>Gender (%)</b>				Percentage of Teachers in Core Academic Subjects Who are Highly Qualified	86.5	-	-
Male	55.5	55.5	51.4	Percentage of Teachers in Core Academic Subjects Who are Not Highly Qualified	13.5	-	-
Female	44.5	44.5	48.6				
<b>Selected Populations (%)</b>							
Limited English Proficiency	0.0	0.0	5.6				
Low-Income	31.4	31.4	28.9				
Special Education	20.1	20.1	16.9				
First Language Not English	2.3	2.3	14.9				
<b>Grades Offered:</b> 07, 08, 09, 10, 11, 12							

## Glossary of Important Terms

**Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP):** A term from the No Child Left Behind federal legislation indicating whether a school is on a path towards all of its students being proficient in reading and math by 2013-2014.

**Common Principles:** A set of common philosophies and practices to which **Essential Schools** adhere. A detailed list of the principles is found on the NCCES ([www.ncces.org](http://www.ncces.org)) and Coalition of Essential School ([www.essentialschools.org](http://www.essentialschools.org)) websites.

**Critical Friends:** Essential Schools and learning centers across the U.S. use site visits form “critical friendships” following a protocol developed at Brown University to provide honest and supportive feedback to facilitate student achievement.

**Essential School:** Guided by the 10 Common Principles of the Coalition of Essential Schools, an Essential School aspires to those principles and finds particular practices and structures to make those ideas about teaching and learning real for a particular community.

**Gateway:** An assessment event that a student must complete satisfactorily in order to move on to the next level. NCCES has Gateways at the end of 8<sup>th</sup> grade, the end of 10<sup>th</sup> grade, and at Graduation.

**No Child Left Behind (NCLB):** Federal legislation passed in 2001 that lays out requirements for public schools K-12 around student achievement, teacher qualifications, state testing, and more. Such requirements in total convey that all students must be taught well, that schools must ensure there are highly qualified teachers in every classroom, and that parents have rights and responsibilities in their child’s education.

**Senior Project:** A large scale individual, independent research project through which every senior demonstrates that they have the skills to move out into the world. This culminating project asks students to demonstrate skills and knowledge they’ve gained over their years in the school.

## **Appendix – Summary of School Improvement Plan**

The NCCES School Improvement Plan synthesizes, prioritizes and organizes the school's needs in to the following main areas of focus to ensure that essential conditions for improved student achievement are in place:

### **STANDARDS-BASED TEACHING and LEARNING**

#### **INFORMING PRACTICE with DATA**

#### **TIME FOR TEACHERS and STUDENTS**

#### **INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP**

#### **GOVERNANCE**

### **STANDARDS-BASED TEACHING & LEARNING**

At this time in our school's development, there is no more important area of focus than that of improving our curriculum, instruction and student learning by assessing student progress on mastery of standards that are aligned with the state curriculum frameworks. This work will fill holes in instruction, eliminate duplication of teaching efforts, and increase accountability for improved student achievement in every classroom and school-wide. Significant attention will be paid to the alignment of year-end comprehensive, summative assessments (Gateways and Roundtables) with the rigorous demands of Senior Project. Expectations at each grade level will align with those of NCCES' culminating Senior Project work, and these standards of mastery will be clearly defined and articulated.

NCCES has hired a full-time Director of Curriculum and Instruction, whose primary responsibilities are to:

- Provide educational leadership to facilitate continuous improvement in classroom instruction and strong, informed support for teachers in developing curriculum and assessments aligned with Essential principles and Massachusetts Frameworks which result in quality teaching and student success.
- Coach teachers on inquiry-based instructional strategies, how to use assessment data to inform instruction, how to differentiate teaching strategies for all content areas and help to build effective rubrics for teaching and learning.
- Coordinate and collaborate with school staff to design and implement professional growth opportunities including formal workshops, group discussions, one-on-one mentoring and additional mentoring to new teachers.

The Director of Curriculum and Instruction (DCI) will oversee the identification of essential standards, adoption of standards by all teachers, and mapping of curriculum to align with State Frameworks. Together with the Principal, she will develop a professional development program that supports and develops core Subject-Area Leaders. Subject-Area Leaders' will also have time in the daily school schedule [52 minutes per day) to provide ongoing observation and feedback to fellow subject-area teachers. Teachers new to NCCES and/or to the teaching profession will receive additional support from the DCI and Instruction, from respective Subject Area Leaders, and from participation in A Critical Friends Group.

In the spring of 2007, teachers were trained to organize their curricula in folders in a centralized electronic location at NCCES. This work will transform over the course of 2007-2008 in to curriculum maps for each course. Mapping curricula will support our efforts to organize curricula across grade level (horizontally) and school-wide (vertically).in alignment with state standards. One expectation is that by the end of the 07-08 academic year, at least two of teachers' six annual units will be designed in Understanding By Design format and that all units will explicitly define the standards being addressed and the assessments being used to measure progress toward mastery of these standards.

We actively seek to hire middle school teachers who are certified to teach in two or more content areas, so that responsibility for ensuring that every student makes progress toward proficiency in ELA and math is shared widely. We will deploy more of our non-core specialists to the upper school, and the placing of specials offered in the middle school will be very strategic (e.g., a performing arts teacher who is also a certified English teacher will offer a curriculum which will address and assess mastery of specific ELA standards).

### **INFORMING PRACTICE WITH DATA**

NCCES leadership has recently been ardently focused on prioritizing the collection, analysis and use of data to improve student learning. Our professional development plan includes ongoing training to help faculty use data to better understand what students know and can do, to develop formative assessments to regularly measure progress, and to develop meaningful summative assessments.

Historically, the school did not maintain an organized system for collecting, centralizing, and analyzing student achievement data. School leaders have already begun to develop this system, recognizing that tools already available to the school (e.g., TestWhiz, PowerSchool) have been previously underutilized. These tools, and others, have capabilities for supporting data collection and analysis efforts. Two school leaders attended TestWhiz training in April, and the school's Principal will be attending PowerSchool University (a week-long institute) in August, 2007. Ongoing professional development for school leaders will focus on the development of collecting and using data wisely to inform instructional practices.

We believe that making multiple sources of student data (e.g., MCAS scores [and item analysis], reading and writing assessment results, grades, PSAT scores, results of formative assessments) easily available to teachers and providing opportunities to analyze this data in various forums will improve curriculum and delivery of instruction in true response to student needs. We are focused intently on cascading academic "interventions" (responding here and now) versus "remediation" (responding to students failure), and our ability to do this well will depend upon efficient and sound processes of data collection, sharing and analysis.

Data analysis will improve school-wide efforts to allocate resources wisely according to most urgent student needs; those in need of additional time and/or support, tutoring, and/or targeted assistance will be identified and referred quickly for intervention. When multiple sources of data regarding student achievement are collected and analyzed well, individually and collectively, instruction may be better designed to engage all students and extend their learning deliberately.

In planning for academic programming, we have examined student data to help drive decisions regarding school schedule, course offerings and the hiring of personnel. We have actively sought teacher candidates who are skillful in conducting formative assessment and who use resultant data to inform instructional practices, and all NCCES faculty will be trained in the use of formative and performance assessments to measure student progress toward mastery of standards.

Students' progress toward or beyond proficiency in ELA and mathematics will be measured by common assessment tools that are aligned with state standards. Such assessments will be administered 4-6 times in the academic year, and resultant data will be analyzed for meaning in planning instruction and interventions.

We have begun to conduct initial screenings of all incoming students in reading, writing, and mathematics and will use this assessment data to allocate our time and resources for the fall semester in direct response to indicated student needs. Additionally, we have learned how to access historical MCAS data for incoming students, so we will have this additional assessment data for planning purposes, as well. (We often wait for months for the transfer of students' historical records, even after multiple written requests. Accessing historical MCAS data will give us guidance in the absence of cumulative records.)

The school recognizes the value of data analysis to inform academic program development and classroom instruction, and new administrative leadership has prioritized this practice for all decision-making. NCCES administration will focus intently on results of multiple sources of data in efforts to assess student performance and to monitor continual progress on meeting AYP for all targeted student groups on the MCAS.

### **TIME FOR TEACHERS and STUDENT**

Increased time for students to receive quality instruction in ELA and/or math in conjunction with adequate and properly utilized common planning time for faculty will serve to create the conditions necessary for improved student achievement.

Students in need of more instructional time and/or support in learning ELA and math will be provided a minimum of 90 minutes per day of instruction (a significant increase from past practices). The need to provide additional time for instruction in math and ELA for students not yet proficient was addressed in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade in January, 2007 (by adding 45 minutes of daily instructional time in ELA and/or math) and will be addressed school-wide for the 2007-2008 year. In addition, NCCES intends to stagger the schedules of some faculty so that additional teachers are consistently available before and after school to offer instruction in ELA and math.

NCCES has always had weekly time scheduled for the purpose of faculty common planning time and professional development; although it appears that much of this time was devoted to the business of building a whole school. As we move forward, this common planning time will be well protected to ensure that it is used for a clearly defined program of professional development. In addition to a minimum of 2 hours per week of common planning time after school hours, common planning time for subject area teams (52 minutes) and time for department leaders to observe teachers (52 minutes) will occur within the school's daily schedule.

In the Spring of 2007, the 7<sup>th</sup> grade daily school schedule was restructured in efforts to better meet the most immediate learning needs of students, especially with regard to reading, writing, and math. The development of this pilot program, “High School Prep”, was guided by most recent data regarding student achievement. This endeavor proved very successful in improving student achievement as measured by internal assessments; we currently look forward to results of most recent MCAS testing. The goal of the program was to respond in action to the question, “How will we respond effectively to students who haven’t learned or who already know it?” This prompt has continued to guide our development of academic programming school-wide for 2007-2008.

NCCES has identified the continued and significant need of our middle school students for intensive work in improving academic achievement that has compelled us to restructure our middle school and to deploy resources accordingly. NCCES knows that an Essential School education is powerful and meaningful; students who are to become critical thinkers who use their minds well must have solid foundational skills in order to access the educational resources available to them and to fully realize their potential.

“High School Prep” and “High School Driving Lessons”, middle school and high school courses, respectively, are designed to help those who are not yet proficient in ELA and math while providing challenge to students already meeting proficiency. Students in grade 10 who are not yet proficient in math may receive up to 130 additional minutes per week of targeted assistance in a very small group setting.

Increased time for students to receive quality instruction in ELA and/or math in conjunction with adequate and properly utilized common planning time for faculty will serve to create the conditions necessary for improved student achievement.

### **INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP**

During its strategic planning process NCCES sought outside assistance for improving school leadership structures and practices and in the spring of 2007 hired a DOE-approved consultant from *Class Measures* to continue this work. Newly hired leadership (an Executive Director, a Principal, and a Director of Curriculum & Instruction) share the primary goal of improving student achievement through improvement of curriculum and instruction in every single classroom.

A comprehensive performance appraisal system will ensure the periodical evaluation of clearly defined areas of faculty performance, including content understanding and instructional practices. In addition, growth in student learning will be evaluated to gain deeper understanding of the quality of instruction and commitment to the school’s plan for improvement. We believe that the coaching, supervisory and organizational/management work of this new leadership team will directly impact the quality of instruction school-wide and will result in ensuring the conditions necessary for improved student achievement.

In January, 2007, NCCES appointed an Acting Principal, a founder of NCCES presently serving as the Director of Student Services, and a comprehensive leadership search process was initiated. The Acting Principal, familiar with the needs of the school and with prior recommendations for

improvements, immediately identified semester II priority action steps for improved student achievement.

After extensive and lengthy leadership organization and search processes conducted by board appointed committees in consult with a DOE-approved educational consultant firm, *Class Measures*,

the board appointed a new Executive Director in May whose tenure began on July 1<sup>st</sup>. Subsequently, the committee-recommended finalist candidate for the Principal position, the Acting Principal, was appointed to the position of Principal effective May 14<sup>th</sup>, 2007. The committee-recommended finalist candidate for the position of Director of Curriculum and Instruction was then hired promptly.

NCCES leadership is positioned stronger than ever to do the work needed to improve student achievement. The principal retains the authority to select and assign staff without regard to seniority or other factors. The right personnel are on hand to do the needed work, and the plan to organize and strategically deploy personnel is established and strong.

The board is investing in the services of an education consultant firm to provide consultancy through this critical year of transition. The consultant will support the school leadership's ongoing work to

1. Create a plan to monitor work to improve systems of communication.
2. Develop a "shadow plan" to define how the management structure will work in practice in response to anticipated management needs one year out and three years out.
3. Create a plan for continued consultation on the following leadership-specific areas:
  - School Management
  - Executive Director: Scope of Leadership Roles and Responsibilities
  - Broader Leadership Development
  - Unification of Leadership Work

Perhaps of greatest significance with regard to NCCES instructional leadership is the plan for the implementation of a comprehensive system of teacher evaluation. A richly fed, systematic system of performance appraisal is being tuned and will be fully implemented in 2007-2008. Teachers will receive meaningful and regular feedback regarding, as well as formal evaluation of content understanding, instructional practices, and commitment to the school's goals and plan for improvement.

### **GOVERNANCE**

Successful implementation of this School Improvement Plan requires a strong, informed and committed board of trustees who will review progress toward implementation of the plan and make governance decisions needed to move the school forward.

During the strategic planning process during the fall of 2005, and through the outside academic and administrative reviews and the preparation of the charter renewal application in the spring of

2006, the board moved from a more re-active problem-solving operation to a pro-active planning organization. NCCES Board of Trustees has developed into a stronger, more mission- focused governing body.

Over the last year, as the board's commitment to the mission and vision of the school was tested when the new principal, whose tenure would be short-lived, attempted to move the organization in a direction endorsed by only two board members, board members took it upon themselves to become better educated in governance through board training. The departure of the principal and the two board members left room for growth, and two strong, experienced individuals were added. These difficult circumstances resulted in the board becoming better educated and trained.

By continuing to review the board's needs and acquiring internal and external expertise where needed, board members will be able to more effectively and efficiently meet the needs of the school and its students. The results of the board self-evaluation, conducted in the spring and summer of 2007, will guide the board's plan for continued board training and needs for recruitment for the 2007-2008 year.

The board has approved a calendar to guide its work through July, 2008. This calendar specifies quarterly review of progress on accountability and school improvement goals. These reviews will take place in October, January, April and July. At these meetings, the board will review students' progress on benchmark assessments as well as progress on meeting the deadlines and benchmarks the school has set in the school improvement and accountability plans. As part of the quarterly review, the board will receive a report from the Executive Director identifying where the school has met benchmarks or made progress and plans for improvement in the next quarter.

By setting annual goals for implementation of school improvement and accountability plan goals, and then evaluating the school leadership on progress toward those goals, the board will ensure that the school is moving forward in addressing student needs. Making a commitment to quarterly review of progress toward meeting these annual goals will enable the board to set policy, allocate resources or make other decisions to improve school performance in a timely manner.

NCCES will be entering the 07-08 school year with two leaders with new positions in the school. The board recognizes that it will need to be diligent in this important transition process. The board has just hired a new Executive Director who began work in July. In August the board will have a retreat workshop to set its goals for the coming year. The Executive Director will use these goals to set her goals for the coming year. The board will discuss and approve goals at its September board meeting. In September the board will approve the goals for the Executive Director for the 2007-2008 year. The board will perform a mid-year performance evaluation of the Executive Director in January, and perform a formal, summative evaluation in August, 2008.

The NCCES Board of Trustees has a plan to ensure its own, continued growth and to systematically and thoroughly evaluate the school's continued progress. This strength in governance will result in increased accountability school-wide, a critical component of the school's plan for improvement.