



CHARTER PETITION

to

New Mexico

Public Education Commission

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Submitted by

The Founding Board of New Mexico Connections Academy

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New Mexico Connections Academy

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I. Executive Summary

Overview & Targeted Student Population

New Mexico Connections Academy (NMCA), a statewide, K-12 full-time virtual charter school with a teaching/learning center in Santa Fe, will set a new standard for virtual education excellence in New Mexico and will advance the mission of serving students statewide, enhancing technological innovation, providing high quality education, and engaging community experiences. The school anticipates engaging Connections Academy of New Mexico, LLC, an affiliate of Connections Education LLC (“Connections”), for curriculum, technology, and other services in compliance with New Mexico statute. Connections has extensive experience over the last ten years in virtual learning. In the 2011–12 school year, Connections served approximately 40,000 students in 21 states via 22 virtual statewide public schools (“Connections affiliated schools”). The Governing Board will be responsible for determining the appropriate services for the school and ensuring the performance of Connections with its obligations under the Statement of Work Agreement as well as insuring compliance with New Mexico statute.

NMCA will address a growing need for students to be educated outside of traditional brick-and-mortar schools, projected to be 500 students in Year 1 and growing to 2000 by Year 5, which is substantiated by the dramatic growth of virtual and charter schools across the country. The most recent available national figures count nearly 200 full time virtual charter schools serving close to 100,000 students in 20 states¹. While brick-and-mortar charter schools reach students within their physical proximity, a high-quality virtual school can leverage excellent teachers and curriculum to meet the needs of students anywhere in the area served who need a virtual school option. The experience of Connections affiliated schools nationally is statewide schools mirror the demographics of the state. Of the students who attend a Connections affiliated school, over 40% met the federal free and reduced lunch guidelines mirroring the national average of 42.9%². According to the New Mexico Department of Education’s Free and Reduced Lunch Report, 66% of enrolled students met the federal income guidelines in 2010-2011.³ We anticipate that NMCA’s families will be similar to the state average of 66% and will include many of modest means as well as significant numbers of single parent/dual working parent households who find effective and creative ways to participate in this program.

New Mexico reported 12.3% of students with disabilities in 2010-11 school year⁴ and it is ranked third in the country for the number of ELL students according to the U.S. Department of Education (2009-2010)⁵. New Mexico classrooms serve the highest percentage of Hispanic students and the second highest percentage of Native American students. Connections affiliated schools have demonstrated success with special needs and English Language Learners (ELL) populations nationally serving an average of 9.8% of students with IEP’s and in California and Nevada, states ranked higher for the % Limited English Proficient students, two Connections affiliated schools are effectively serving ELL students. For those Connections affiliated schools that are their own Local Education Association’s (LEA), the special education percentage can be as high as 18%, as it is at Commonwealth Connections Academy in Pennsylvania. It is anticipated that NMCA will serve a similar percentage of special needs students as its own LEA and effectively serve ELL students who enroll. The individualization of the program will help meet the diversity of needs, linguistic structures, and unique cultures that are valued in New Mexico.

NMCA Founding Board also anticipates that 20% of students will come from homeschooling based upon experience in other Connections affiliated schools. According to the PED’s Office for Parents Division, there are 9,057 students reported as homeschooled. It could be assumed that not all homeschooling families are documented and that the number of New Mexico homeschooling families could be higher. NMCA anticipates serving 100 previously homeschooled students in Year 1 increasing to 400 students by Year 5 which is 20% of the anticipated enrollment.

¹ Center for Education Reform, www.edreform.com

² http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d09/tables/dt09_042.asp

³ <http://www.ped.state.nm.us/IT/schoolFactSheets.html>

⁴ <http://www.ped.state.nm.us/IT/schoolFactSheets.html>

⁵ <http://www.eddataexpress.ed.gov/data-element-explorer.cfm/deid/4/>

Finally, the NMCA Founding Board have conducted extensive due diligence in evaluating a virtual school program provider. The Founding Board is interested in establishing a full time statewide virtual public charter school in New Mexico that offers the Connections program for its strong academic results and high quality offering.

- ✓ The Connections program is the first virtual school program to receive accreditation from the Commission on International and Trans-Regional Accreditation (CITA), now a part of AdvancED™, the world's largest accreditation body for K-12 school programs, serving more than 27,000 public and private schools and districts across the United States and in 69 countries that educate over 15 million students. The program was first granted accreditation in 2005.
- ✓ Connections has been recognized for its instructional design and focus on best practices in virtual education.
- ✓ Connections Education won three BESSIE Awards for Exemplary Educational Software 2012.
- ✓ Connections Education won EDDIE Award—Honored for Best High School Chemistry Site 2011.
- ✓ Connections Education won one of the USDLA's Top Awards: the 21st Century Award for Best Practices in Distance Learning 2011.
- ✓ Connections Education's Earth Science Course won the USDLA's "Best Practices Award for Distance Learning Programming" in the PreK–12 Category 2011.
- ✓ Connections Academy's Algebra 1 course won BESSIE Award—Honored as Best Math Website 2011.
- ✓ The Connections program in Florida has consistently received an "A" rating by the Florida Department of Education for five straight years and outperforms the State of Florida on the state test.
- ✓ Ohio Connections Academy was the only statewide Ohio eSchool rated Excellent in 2010 by the Ohio Department of Education.
- ✓ The breadth and depth of curriculum, accommodations for special populations, including but not limited to special needs, struggling learners, Gifted and Talented, and low income families makes Connections Academy an ideal fit for the mission, vision, and needs of New Mexico Connections Academy.

Type of Students Served

The Founding Board anticipates students from each county will be represented when information about the school is widely available. It is also anticipated that 50-60% of the students will come from the traditional classroom; approximately 20-25% from homeschooling and the rest from private schools or students new to school (entering kindergartners or first graders, moved from another state). Students whose instructional needs will be effectively met by NMCA include: children who are in rural communities and lack access to public school options; children who are far ahead of or far behind their peers in school, including students at risk of academic failure and those coping with social issues who may particularly benefit from personalized instruction; young people pursuing artistic or athletic careers or career development opportunities that require a flexible schedule; children who are homebound due to illness or disability; children who are homeless; and students with special learning needs. NMCA estimates that these students together make up less than 2% of New Mexico's total school age population but may be over-represented among those who are struggling academically or will drop out of traditional public schools.

Evidence of Support

The NMCA Board also took notice of the interest in virtual schooling expressed by families throughout New Mexico. Without any parental outreach efforts, over 3200 families have expressed interest in learning more about this virtual program and additional families have participated in information sessions, social media, and email correspondence. See Section V for more detailed information. The board also has received several letters of support, including from the community (attached as Appendix M).

Key Innovative Features

Students learn best when lessons match their interests and abilities. The mission of New Mexico Connections Academy (NMCA) is to help each K-12 student, throughout the state of New Mexico who needs an alternative to the traditional classroom for a particular time period, maximize his or her potential and meet the highest performance standards through a uniquely individualized learning program, access to high quality NM-certified teachers, and high parental involvement. Connections' Personalized Performance Learning process—an

academic road map for each student- serves this purpose for individualizing instruction, providing high quality teachers, and providing opportunities for parental involvement in their child's learning.

NMCA will offer students anywhere in the state hundreds of courses, dozens of clubs and activities, and access to resources that will help prepare them for the global economy they will be living and working in as adults. The personalized approach to NMCA will provide important skills to New Mexico students including independent thinking, problem solving and collaboration not only with people in their community but potentially across the globe. With an additional focus on STEM (Science-Technology-Engineering-Math) education (see below), NMCA students will be prepared for the global economy with job-skills for the 21st century.

Plans to Improve Student Achievement

According to the Public Education Department “far too many students drop out or graduate from high school without the knowledge and skills required for success in the 21st century workplace and/or postsecondary education.”⁶ In addition, the high school truancy rate is 26%⁷. According to the New Mexico Standards-Based Assessment (NMSBA) results, nearly 52% of 11th graders are not proficient in reading and almost 62% are not on grade level in mathematics⁸. NMCA will be well equipped to respond to the needs of students who need a more personalized approach to learning.

There is a need in New Mexico for additional charter options in rural communities. Currently there are only 18 charter schools in rural communities⁹. In addition, approximately 25% of district and charter schools in rural communities meet two performance metrics: 50% of students are at proficient or advanced and demonstrating growth. NMCA hopes to reach students in rural areas who may not have the educational options they need to be successful. Students throughout New Mexico, particularly in rural communities, need a rigorous, full time, high quality school with excellent teachers and will find NMCA to be a unique alternative. Rural school districts will still thrive but will have the ability to refer a student who needs a different program to help them be successful. A full-time virtual schooling option will help deliver additional options effectively and efficiently.

A STEM School-within-a-School Academy-Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics-is one of great interest to the NMCA Board. The Board noted Arne Duncan, US Secretary of Education, who stated, “Everyone has a stake in improving STEM education. Inspiring all our students to be capable in math and science will help them contribute in an increasingly technology-based economy, and will also help America prepare the next generation of STEM professionals-scientists, engineers, architects and technology professionals-to ensure our competitiveness.” The NMCA Board believes students in New Mexico will benefit from such a focus including the ability to obtain jobs in the future economy. According to a new report released, job postings in the STEM fields outnumber unemployed people by 2-1.¹⁰ According to New Mexico Project 2012 that focuses on math and science education, only 42% of 8th grade math students score at proficient or above and only 27% in science (2009). In addition, there are only 26 new math and science teachers that are produced each year.¹¹ A STEM Academy will provide access to innovative, highly qualified teachers, specifically in math and science, and will help inspire and prepare students throughout New Mexico for a STEM field. “When it comes to pushing for better results in STEM learning, impatience is a virtue.”¹² The need for a virtual STEM school to provide access for students throughout New Mexico is now.

New Mexico Connections Academy will provide another opportunity in the portfolio of learning options for students and help students achieve their academic goals through personalized learning, high quality teachers, and involved parents.

⁶ <http://www.ped.state.nm.us/graduation/index.html>

⁷ <http://www.ped.state.nm.us/it/fs/truancy/SY2010%20Habitual%20Truancy%20by%20School%20Type.pdf>

⁸ http://ped.state.nm.us/NMPED%20Strategic%20Plan%202011_2012.pdf

⁹ <http://www.nmccs.org/school-dashboard>

¹⁰ [Change the Equation's Vital Signs, http://www.changetheequation.org/stemdemand](http://www.changetheequation.org/stemdemand)

¹¹ http://www.sfafs.org/nmproject2012_documentation.asp

¹² [Ursula Burns, Xerox Chairman and CEO, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/linda-rosen/where-the-jobs-are-stem-f_b_1474046.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/linda-rosen/where-the-jobs-are-stem-f_b_1474046.html)

II. Education Plan

A. School size. State the projected enrollment, grade levels to be served and student/teacher ratio.

Academic Year	Number of Students	Grade Levels	Student/Teacher Ratio
2013-2014	500	K-12	43
2014-2015	700	K-12	37
2015-2016	1000	K-12	32
2016-2017	1400	K-12	30
2017-2018	2000	K-12	26
At Capacity (enrollment cap)	2000	K-12	26

B. Vision. State the vision for the proposed school.

The vision of NMCA will be to reach students for whom a cutting-edge virtual approach provides the very best pathway to school success through a uniquely individualized learning program that combines the best in virtual education with very real connections among students, family, teachers, and the community to promote academic and emotional success for every learner. By providing success for students who may otherwise have been unsuccessful in their educational goals including goals in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM), NMCA increases the number of students who have a strong academic foundation and a love of learning especially in the STEM fields. This ultimately impacts the state's high school graduation rate, postsecondary enrollment, and the economic future of New Mexico.

C. Mission. State the mission of the proposed school.

The mission of New Mexico Connections Academy (NMCA) is to help each K-12 student, throughout the state of New Mexico who needs an alternative to the traditional classroom for a particular time period, maximize his or her potential and meet the highest performance standards through a uniquely individualized learning program, access to high quality NM-certified teachers, and high parental involvement. The mission will also include a school-with-in-a-school model with a focus on science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM).

D. Student Performance Goals. State the student performance goals that specifically relate to the mission of the school. Goals must be specific, measurable (based on identified indicators and expected performance levels that can be measured by a reliable instrument.) In addition, the goals should be ambitious, but attainable, as well as aligned to the school's mission. All goals must reference a time frame by which achievement can be accomplished. Student performance goals that address the following are required:

1. Student academic performance

- Percent of students scoring Proficient & Above on state tests in Reading (Grades 3-8 and 11) will meet or exceed state averages every year, beginning in Year 1.
- Percent of students scoring Proficient & Above on state tests in Writing (Grades 3, 5, and 8) will meet or exceed state averages every year, beginning in Year 3, and will be within 10% points of state average in Year 1 and 5% points of state average in Year 2.
- Percent of students scoring Proficient & Above on state tests in Math (Grades 3-8 and 11) will meet or exceed state averages every year, beginning in Year 3, and will be within 10% points of state average in Year 1 and 5% points of state average in Year 2.
- Percent of students scoring Proficient & Above on state tests in Science (Grades 4, 7, and 11) will meet or exceed state averages every year, beginning in Year 3, and will be within 10% points of state average in Year 1 and 5% points of state average in Year 2.

2. Student academic growth

The school's "conditional status" (reflecting student growth as measured by the NM Value Added Model (VAM)) will be above average in each year for which it is reported by the State in Reading and in Math – indicating that student growth will be average or better as compared with the rest of the State.

3. Achievement gaps in both proficiency and growth between student subgroups

School will meet or exceed SGTs (School Growth Targets) for each eligible subgroup each year, beginning in Year 2.

4. Attendance

Student Attendance will exceed 95% every year, beginning in Year 2, and in Year 1 it will exceed 90%.

5. Recurrent enrollment

75% or more of all Full Academic Year (FAY) students will re-enroll for the next academic year, every year beginning in Year 3, and in Year 2 it will exceed 65%. (There is no Year 1 result possible).

6. High school-college readiness

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
% of 12 th Graders who have taken SAT, ACT or AP Exam	25%	30%	35%	40%	45%

***Based on 12th Graders enrolled from 10.1 to graduation or end of year**

Note: The school may replace this measure with the goal of having the percent of students successfully completing college or career preparatory courses exceeding the state average.

7. Graduation rate

Four year cohort graduation rate will meet or exceed the state average when it can be calculated. Until then, the school's percent of Full Academic Year Seniors graduating will exceed 90% (except in Year 1 & 2 when it will exceed 80%).

8. Growth of the lowest scoring twenty-fifth percentile of students in the public school in reading and mathematics.

Growth among bottom quartile students in reading and in math will exceed the state average in each year for which it is reported.

E. Organizational Goals (Optional): State the school's organizational goals that specifically related to the mission of the school. Goals must be specific, measurable (based on identified indicators and expected performance levels that can be measured by a reliable instrument). In addition, the goals should be ambitious but attainable, as well as aligned to the school's mission. All goals must reference a time frame by which achievement can be accomplished.

1. Performance on Connections annual parent satisfaction survey will meet or exceed 90% parent satisfaction with the school.
2. Performance on the annual NM Quality of Education Survey will meet or exceed the state average for parental satisfaction on all measures except for factors that are not applicable in an online environment.
3. The number of secondary students enrolled in advanced STEM courses will be at least 5% in Years 1 and 2 and at least 8% in subsequent years of total enrollment.

F. Curriculum

1. Describe your school's philosophical framework or particular pedagogical approach that supports the school's mission and guides instructional and curricular decisions.

Please refer to the definitions section in Appendix O. The description of the NMCA philosophical framework and pedagogical approach includes unique terminology specific to online education offered by our proposed partner, Connections.

New Mexico Connections Academy believes that children in the 21st century must become literate and articulate, mathematically competent, scientifically and technologically adept and have the opportunity to develop their creative and physical abilities. NMCA recognizes its responsibility to generate enthusiasm and excitement for the lifelong process of learning by providing a curriculum that is relevant, integrated and age-appropriate at the same time is aligned to state and common core academic content standards.

At NMCA, students in K-12 – including many who have not thrived in the traditional classroom – engage in a

challenging learning program that is tailored to their individual needs and focused on equipping them for success in the 21st century. The primary building blocks of NMCA's instructional approach will be individualized instruction; high-quality teaching; and parent involvement.

Individualized Instruction: NMCA students will work with rigorous curriculum aligned to not only state but common core state standards (as they are released). Instruction is focused on the individual student and with assessments, including frequent formative assessments and teacher directed curriculum based assessments (see above). Students, parents, and teachers will be provided data that is accurate and timely allowing students' growth to be tracked over time. Individualizing instruction also allows for multiple pathways for learner achievement. Students work individually on their Personalized Learning Plan (PLP) (see definitions), maximizing their potential by ensuring that academic strengths are challenged and that any academic weaknesses are diagnosed and addressed. With students being at the center of the "learning triad" (see description below), instruction is customized to best fit their individual needs. Teachers tap into a wide array of resources and modify lessons as needed for each student. With the flexibility of virtual schooling, students can truly learn "anytime, anywhere"! NMCA will also focus on STEM by providing a rich in-depth curriculum in the key content areas for students who are especially interested in the STEM fields and individualized instruction.

High-quality Teaching: The NMCA teachers will implement the Connections Standards for Effective Online Teaching and will participate in a performance evaluation system aligned to the teaching standards, school goals, and student performance. Through ongoing teacher training and professional development, participation in professional learning communities, peer review, and a vibrant career ladder, teachers will be effective and consistently focused on continuous improvement and student learning. Instructional leaders will have data provided through Connexus (see definitions) and the state accountability system that will drive professional development both for individual teachers and the school as a whole.

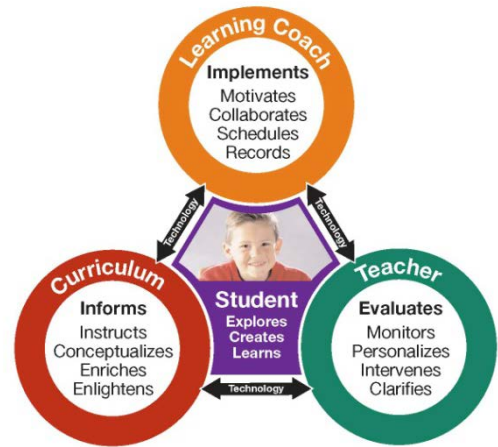
Parent Involvement: Parent involvement will be valued at NMCA. Parents serve as Learning Coaches and play an active role in the learning process from providing input on the Personalized Learning Plan (PLP) and communicating regularly with teachers. Regular feedback through surveys and the Star Track system encourages summative and formative feedback for the learning process and the program. Training is also provided to parents to insure that they have the necessary tools and supports to be successful learning coaches. With parent involvement being a central piece of NMCA, the whole family may get involved in health programs, community programs, and field trips.

Because of the three building blocks, NMCA will also have comprehensive school and community supports. Virtual schools like NMCA open up a vast range of possibilities and options for the delivery of the full continuum of special education and related services such as speech-language, occupational or physical therapy, psychological counseling, and other services to eligible students. In addition, through a comprehensive guidance counseling program focused on college and career readiness, students are provided career and work force resources, course options, and work study internship opportunities.

NMCA offers students throughout New Mexico, regardless of zip code, a high quality, high touch K-12 school without walls utilizing state of the art technology tools. Virtual schools offer a unique opportunity to utilize data to drive instruction and performance. Accessible to key stakeholders, including parents and students, accountability is robust and transparent.

NMCA also believes that the individualized and supported educational program facilitates the development of self-direction and personal responsibility among its students. In these ways, NMCA will meet the objective of producing students who are self-motivated, competent, lifelong learners. NMCA believes that children learn best in a safe, positive environment in which they are respected, accepted, valued, and nurtured as unique individuals and are challenged to achieve their full potential. From this, it follows that students learn best when the instruction is tailored to their unique needs and when they are supported by adults who are committed to their success. The key facets of the Connections instructional model are as follows:

- The Learning Triad™: Instruction at Connections surrounds each student with the resources needed for success. Each student is part of a “learning triad” as illustrated at right. (Details on the curriculum portion of the triad are discussed below.)
- A complete learning team: At NMCA, student learning benefits from committed educators and involved parents who provide total support for the student’s PLP. Members of each student’s learning team include a face-to-face Learning Coach; one or more highly qualified, New Mexico-certified teachers (see “Certificated, Highly Qualified Teachers,” below); and the highly trained Connections curriculum specialists and “education resource center” staff who support these teachers in their daily work. In effect, each NMCA student has a staff of experts working together to leverage the school’s myriad resources – technological, instructional, and interpersonal – for his or her success.



- The Learning Coach: Each Connections student has a Learning Coach, a parent, extended family member, or similarly qualified adult designated by the parent/guardian who works in person with each Connections student under the guidance of the licensed professional teacher. At the high school level, the Learning Coach is less involved with daily instruction but serves an important supervisory role for the student.
- Certificated, Highly Qualified Teachers: Each Connections student has one or more certificated New Mexico teachers specially trained in the Connections curriculum and instructional method. Teachers work closely with each student on a one-on-one basis using innovative technology tools and instructional pedagogy. The teacher is responsible for evaluating assignments and work products, providing instructional assistance, assigning and scoring assessment activities, and providing feedback on the child's performance. Based on a student’s demonstrated mastery of the material, teachers add, expand, modify, or replace assignments; they also grade students in each subject for the regular report cards and make promotion or retention decisions. Depending on the need of the learner, teacher contact – via telephone, LiveLesson session, and WebMail – with the student and Learning Coach may be as frequent as several times a day, and at a minimum once every two weeks depending on student age. Teachers do not wait to be contacted; they are proactive participants in their students’ learning plans. Expectations such as these form the basis for Connections’ Core Standards for Teaching, which are an integral part of Connections’ online teaching (see Exhibit D). Teacher evaluations and competencies are aligned to these standards of teaching (see Section B). Connections families are always welcome to visit the school office/teaching center during business hours to meet with their teachers in person.
- Student: New Mexico-certified teachers will work with Learning Coaches and students to customize student learning experiences based on specific academic needs, learning pace, learning styles, and personal interests. This program personalization is an ongoing process that also includes the creation of a written plan for all members of the learning team to follow. Utilizing Connections’ unique Personalized Performance Learning approach each student is provided with instructional and supplemental programs tailored to meet the student’s individual needs.

The student’s teacher, in conjunction with the student and Learning Coach, will develop a PLP. The PLP is specifically designed to maximize the pupil’s potential by ensuring that academic strengths are challenged and that any academic weaknesses are diagnosed and addressed. The PLP is developed at the beginning of the school year by using a variety of techniques and data points, including the student’s past performance, demonstrated strengths and weaknesses, diagnostic assessments, parental input, and teacher interviews. Examples of items currently included in the PLP are a learning styles questionnaire, a set of student goals for the

year, progress monitoring of student performance, and an ongoing record of the PLP conferences between the Learning Coach and/or student and the teacher.

The personalization process includes the following components: initial academic placement and course selection; ongoing performance testing; interest inventories; review of student work samples; detailed phone conferences; goal-setting; adjustment of student schedules and lesson pacing; instructional interventions; enrollment in elective courses; and strategies for families to implement throughout the year. The process also includes several goal-review and progress monitoring sessions, including a final conference at the end of the school year to review progress.

In effect, each NMCA student will have many experts working together to leverage the school's myriad resources – technological, instructional, and interpersonal – for his or her success. We believe that working together as a team will create student success!

2. Provide research and/or data that substantiate how this philosophy/approach will help the school achieve high outcomes for students.

Education research has shown that the touchstones of the Personalized Performance Learning instructional model—parental involvement, individualized instruction, and high-quality teaching—have been directly correlated to top student achievement.

Individualized instruction: Students clearly benefit from instruction that is individualized in terms of pace, content, sequence, and style. Among the many studies on this topic, Margaret Haertel and her colleagues show in “What Helps Students Learn?”¹³ that “curriculum and assessment tailored to student ability and academic background” to assure “an appropriate level of task difficulty for students and an appropriate instructional pace” is a proven tool for helping students achieve. A recent study analyzing personalization via computer assisted instruction demonstrated increased content knowledge and critical thinking¹⁴. At NMCA, instruction will be individualized for every student, every day.

High-quality teaching: Each teacher is equipped with the skills and technology they need to bring out the best in every student. In his landmark study correlating test data with teacher quality, Harold Wenglinsky¹⁵ of the Educational Testing Service showed a direct link between good teaching and higher test scores. While past research on the impact of good teaching occurred before virtual schools were available as study sites, more recent research focusing specifically on virtual learning echoes the critical importance of teacher quality. For example, 2005's A Synthesis of New Research on K-12 Online Learning¹⁶ shows that the unique ability of an online teacher to communicate one-on-one with students and offer personalized feedback – as teachers at NMCA will – is key to student success in virtual learning environments. At NMCA, teachers will be high-quality and equipped with the skills and technology needed to bring out the highest potential in each student.

Parent involvement: Decades of research show that parent participation in education is very closely related to student achievement¹⁷. In *A New Generation of Evidence: The Family Is Critical to Student Achievement*¹⁸, Anne T. Henderson and Nancy Berla document concrete benefits of parent involvement for students, including higher grades and test scores, higher graduation rates, and greater enrollment in postsecondary education. A Stanford study found that using parents as tutors brought significant and immediate changes in children's I.Q. scores. A recent study showed that parental involvement increased students motivation to learn including school

¹³ Wang, Margaret C., Haertel, Geneva D., and Walberg, Herbert J., “What Helps Students Learn?” Educational Leadership, 1993.

¹⁴ Svenningsen, L., & Pear, J. J. (2011). Effects of computer-aided personalized system of instruction in developing knowledge and critical thinking in blended learning courses. *The Behavior Analyst Today*, 12, 1, 33-39.

¹⁵ Wenglinsky, Harold, *How Teaching Matters: Bringing the Classroom Back Into Discussions of Teacher Quality*, Educational Testing Service, 2000.

¹⁶ NCREL Synthesis of New Research on K-12 Online Learning, 2005, North Central Regional Education Laboratory/Learning Point Associates. www.ncrel.org/tech/synthesis

¹⁷ Fan, X., & Chen, M. (2001). Parental involvement and students' academic achievement: A meta-analysis. *Educational Psychology Review*, 13, 1, 1-22.

¹⁸ Henderson, A., & Berla, N. (Eds.). *A new generation of evidence: The family is critical to student achievement*. National Committee for Citizens in Education, Center for Law and Education, Washington, DC, 1994.

engagement, goal achievement, and even motivation to read¹⁹. At NMCA, parents will be closely involved in their child's education.

Online Learning: During its 10 years of operation, Connections has developed its own methods of online teaching that have enabled them to produce the highest academic performance of any family of K-12 virtual schools in the country.²⁰ Results from the 2011-2012 school year are still being compiled, so highlights from both 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 are referenced below. All results are those publicly reported by the states on their standardized tests, not based on any internal measures.

Highlights from 2009-2010 and 2010-2011

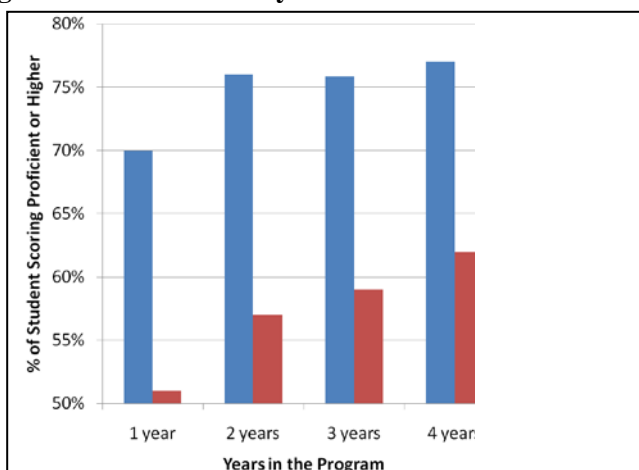
- Ohio Connections Academy (OCA) is the only online program to ever receive a rating of “Excellent”.
- Oregon Connections Academy's Achievement Index on the state report card is rated “Outstanding”; 88.5% of students in reading and 79.1% of students in math, meet, exceed or meet growth standards.
- Capistrano Connections Academy (serving southern California) achieves AYP; their “Academic Performance Index” which is a measure of growth used by the state is 793 versus state-created index of similar schools of 725; the state target API target was 777.
- Commonwealth Connections Academy (CCA, serving the state of PA) met 22 of 25 AYP targets, missing only math for two minority subgroups; the state report card shows that 100% of Black/African American students met state graduation requirements and 95% of low income students met state graduation requirements.
- Florida Connections Academy is graded an “A” by the state of Florida (the 5th consecutive year); the state reports that over 65% of students in the lowest 25% (i.e. students generally failing for years) made measurable learning gains in reading and 63% do so in math.
- Ohio Connections Academy is rated “Effective”; OCA actually increased its performance index score (the basis for the rating) from what it received during 2009-2010, but the rating criteria was changed to make reaching the top categories more difficult. Highlights: value-added measure of growth met for all grades except 6th grade math. 11th grade graduation test results: 100% reading, 90.6% math, 98.6% writing, 90.1% science, 92.2% social studies.
- Nevada Connections Academy's high school program again achieves AYP.
- Wisconsin Connections Academy again achieves AYP (for the 7th consecutive year).

All Connections affiliated school staffs and their governing bodies are provided with detailed data concerning student performance on state standardized tests for each year and over time. The increasing popularity of virtual education presents a challenge because new students generally enter the school behind in their academic performance, and new students represent a significant portion of the overall population. To rely exclusively on proficiency data rather than student growth data in some ways understates a school's accomplishments. Connections affiliated schools have also been shown to produce significant gains in Reading and Math proficiency for students who have used the program for multiple years, as shown in the graph on the next page.

¹⁹ Gonzalez-DeHass, A. R., Willems, P. P., & Doan Holbein, M. F. (2005). Examining the relationship between parental involvement and student motivation. *Educational Psychology Review*, 17, 2, 99-123.

²⁰ Based on the percentage of schools operated making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP); state report card ratings; and the overall percentage of enrolled students in the program rated as proficient or above on state standardized tests.

Reading and Math Proficiency for Connections Students over Time



3. Provide a general description/design of the curriculum to be used that supports and is aligned with the school's vision, mission, and stated goals.

NMCA combines proven and rigorous curriculum materials with the best in technology-enhanced learning such that a significant portion of the curriculum is delivered through the Internet and other electronic means. The Connections curriculum will align with all New Mexico Learning and Common Core State Standards. In addition to initial development of state standards alignment by the Connections curriculum specialists, the teaching staff at NMCA will collaborate on an ongoing basis to review the state standards for each core course and provide additional material or lessons for any gaps still identified. The curriculum is updated regularly, with Governing Board approval, based on a rigorous analysis of student performance on state standards as measured by state testing results and internal assessments. The curriculum as described here represents curriculum that is being implemented for the 2012-13 school. As described above, the curriculum is regularly evaluated, upgraded, and enhanced based on the needs of the school and students.

In addition to working with the curriculum materials described above, NMCA students will have the opportunity to participate regularly in both face-to-face and virtual community activities. As an integral part of the Connections academic program, students are offered access to more than 22 clubs and activities through which they can explore interests beyond the classroom, develop leadership skills, and make friends within their school and with students from other Connections affiliated schools. Some of the clubs available are Art Club, Book Club, Chess Club, Digital Storytelling, Environmental, Math Club I and II, Pen Pals, Pens and Lens, Poetry Corner, and Science Fair. Because of an intensive focus on STEM, additional focus will be available in the STEM clubs. Recently a club in a Connections affiliated school in Pennsylvania won the state engineering competition, competing against brick and mortar and other virtual schools, and took second place in the national competition. Winning a state engineering competition and placing in nationals are evidence that the Connections program is a perfect combination of real-world face-to-face learning and virtual education. Connecting with other students is one of the most important parts of a great school experience. Through Connections, NMCA will be able to offer more clubs and activities than any other online school. Whether a student is interested in chess, robotics, poetry, art, the environment, and so much more, NMCA will be able to offer it. Clubs and activities let students:

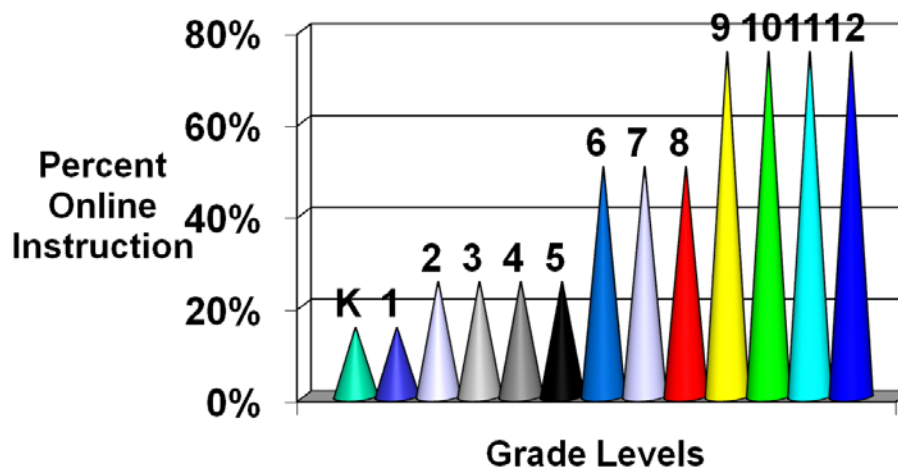
- Easily make friends,
- Connect with other students across the country,
- Develop leadership skills,
- Explore new interests and expand their knowledge,
- Participate in exciting contests and competitions,
- And have fun.

Connections students will expand their educational horizons while interacting with local students in New Mexico, as well as Connections students across the country.

Face-to-face activities include field trips and community outings facilitated by the proposed NMCA staff and/or community coordinators – parent volunteers whom NMCA will support in organizing such activities for families who live nearby. Field trips may include visits to the National Museum of Nuclear Science & History in Albuquerque, White Sands National Monument at Holloman AFB, and the Fort Union National Monument in Watrous. In addition, the school is considering a potential partnership with Explora including the mobile science lab to increase hands-on opportunities for STEM exploration throughout New Mexico.

NMCA’s virtual-based activities include online bulletin boards/forums; book chats; teacher-led small-group discussions using real-time “groupware” technology that integrates electronic whiteboard and voice over IP; learning-focused webmail with the ability to collaborate with teammates on virtual group projects. NMCA will produce monthly newsletters that celebrate student and school successes, showcase student work, provide tips from teachers, and highlight upcoming events. Connections also produces an online yearbook, in which all students from all schools are encouraged to participate. Finally, NMCA will apply for a chapter of the National Honor Society in order to provide students opportunities for community involvement, character development, and interaction with peers and community members. Of Connections affiliated schools nationwide, 17 are members of the National Honor Society and 11 of those are members of the National Junior Honor Society.

All of the collaborative online activities and communications tools are restricted for use only by members of the NMCA community; parents can feel comfortable that their children are experiencing this technology safely within the “walled garden” of NMCA. Given the balance of modes and media for learning at NMCA, actual time online for students (as compared to parents and teachers) will vary according to each student’s developmental level, learning needs, and learning styles. Students in grades K and 1 may spend up to 15% of their time online; students in grades 2 -5 may have a range of 15 - 25%; students in grades 6 - 12 may range from 50-75+% of time online. The curriculum and instruction will be the perfect balance of individualized learning, group and collaborative learning, and computer instruction.



4. Provide evidence that the proposed curriculum is research-based and has been or will be effective with the population the school plans to serve.

NMCA’s instructional design will be known as the Personalized Performance Learning Model (described above). The three primary components are:

1. Individualized instruction
2. High-quality teaching
3. Parent involvement

Because it is built upon a foundation of educational research and experience in online education, NMCA’s approach promises to result in meaningful academic improvement for our students. NMCA’s proposed

curriculum is research based²¹ and uses proven instructional design principles such as:

- Curriculum fosters breadth and depth of understanding in subject area
- Content is aligned to national, state, and common core state standards
- Curriculum is supported by quality, reputable, recently published textbooks and/or proven instructional resources and materials
- Content and assessments are accurate and unbiased
- Content is current, relevant and provides real-world applications
- Content is appropriate for the learner (age, ability, background, reading level, learning style)
- Instructional design is adaptable and flexible to meet individual needs of Learning Coaches and students
- Instructional design provides students opportunities to improve learning skills using technological tools (e.g., virtual labs and instruments, Teachlet® tutorials, business software, online calculator).
- Navigation is intuitive and age-appropriate
- Scope of course is appropriate with regard to amount of content, length of course and lessons, and course requirements
- Lesson introduction is effective and presents lesson objectives, accesses prior knowledge, sets expectations and motivates
- Background information effectively prepares students to access new content, skills, and strategies
- Curriculum includes opportunities for developing problem-solving and critical thinking skills and real-world applications
- Curriculum includes opportunities for collaboration and independent study
- Curriculum includes opportunities to develop oral and written communication skills
- Curriculum incorporates timely and appropriate feedback to students
- Curriculum promotes active learning: Each Connections curriculum course includes active learning elements (including online and/or offline interaction) that address diverse learning styles and preferences, including textual, visual, auditory, and/or hands-on. The Connections courses include 1,600 Teachlet® proprietary instructional movies and more than 1,000 primary source and instructional videos. Integrated “i-text” electronic textbooks are licensed from a variety of leading publishers including Pearson, McGraw Hill, and others, while non-proprietary technology-based content is licensed from “best of breed” providers such as, BrainPOP, Scholastic, Inc., Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Company, and Discovery Education®. In addition, the instructional design includes interactive LiveLesson web-conferencing sessions and threaded discussions.

Connections utilizes *ADDIE*, a five-phase instructional design model that is research-based consisting of Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation, and Evaluation. Each step has an outcome that feeds into the next step in the sequence.

Analysis: During analysis, the curriculum team identifies the goals and objectives, the audience’s needs, existing knowledge, and any other relevant characteristics. Analysis also considers the learning environment, any constraints, the delivery options, and the timeline for the project.

Design: A systematic process of specifying learning objectives. Detailed storyboards and prototypes are often made, and the look and feel, graphic design, user-interface and content are determined here.

Development: The actual creation (production) of the content and learning materials based on the Design phase.

Implementation: During implementation, the plan is put into action and a procedure for training the learner and teacher is developed. Materials are delivered or distributed to the student group. After delivery, the effectiveness of the training materials is evaluated.

Evaluation: This phase consists of (1) formative and (2) summative evaluation. Formative evaluation is present in each stage of the ADDIE process. Summative evaluation consists of tests designed for criterion-related referenced items and providing opportunities for feedback from the users. Revisions are made as necessary.

²¹ American Psychological Association’s Learner-Centered Psychological Principles: A Framework for School Reform and Redesign
<http://www.apa.org/ed/governance/bea/learner-centered.pdf>

These key principles are reflected in a consistent instructional design for all courses, shown below, allowing for ease of use by students and Learning Coaches.



Getting Started - An overview of the lesson will be provided, along with a fact or exercise to pique a student's interest and establish relevancy and connection with prior knowledge.



Instruction - Teachlets™ will incorporate graphics, video, and audio to show the student the concepts and ideas he/she will need to complete the lessons.



Activity - The student will apply what he or she has learned during the instructional segment.



Review - This section will recap the key terms, concepts or ideas covered in the lesson.



Assessment - Finally, the student will be required to show what he or she can now do as a result of what he or she has learned in the lesson.

Through its use of the Connections curriculum and instructional design, NMCA will be in close keeping with leading research and national standards on effective online course development and instruction. Each Connections lesson plan follows a consistent and visually appealing format as shown below.

The research underscores the importance of integration of tools for student-to-teacher and student-to-student interaction and the central role of highly qualified, specially trained professional teachers.²² In addition, the National Standards for Quality Online Teaching focus on teacher use of assessments, data, and ongoing communication to bring out the best in each unique online learner.²³ Connections curriculum and instructional design accommodates the range of learning styles and is designed for individualized pacing, balanced with optimum interaction. The rigorous program includes both fundamental skills and higher-order thinking, which together prepare students for further education as well as lifelong, independent learning.

The curriculum will be effective for the population that it plans to serve based upon the following data collected from other charter schools across the country who are partnering with Connections to deliver a high-quality program:

Advanced Placement, SAT & ACT scores, and graduation rates: Students attending Connections affiliated schools routinely outperform their peers on Advanced Placement (AP ®) exams as well:

- For the 2009-10 School Year: Connections students: 63% scored Qualified, Well Qualified and Extremely Well Qualified, vs. 58% of students nationally scored Qualified, Well Qualified and Extremely Well Qualified on AP exams

²² Smith, Rosina, Clark, Tom, and Blomeyer, Robert, *A Synthesis of New Research on K-12 Online Learning*, Learning Point Associates/North Central Regional Educational Laboratory; Naperville, IL; 2005.

²³ The National Standards for Quality Online Teaching, North American Council for Online Learning, www.nacol.org, 2007.

On the ACT exam, the average Connections student composite score (2010-2011 school year): was 22, above the national average of 21.1. On the SAT, students attending Connections affiliated schools again show the same outstanding performance:

SAT Performance

Subject Area	Connections student avg scores ('10-'11)	National Average ('10-'11)	Connections vs. National Avg (%)
Critical Reading	579	497	16.5%
Math	517	514	0.5%
Writing	532	489	8.8%
Total	1628	1500	8.5%

Graduation Rates: Graduation rates for students who were enrolled at the end of the year for 2010-2011 for Connections affiliated schools range was 84%. Arizona Connections Academy with a population who may share some similarities with NMCA had a graduation rate of 84% while Idaho had a graduation rate of 87% and California, a graduation rate of 78%.

Academic Gains of Sub-Groups: The founders of New Mexico Connections Academy are especially impressed by the documented learning gains of students attending Connections affiliated schools, believing that this is one of the most important measures of academic impact and quality for any educational program. Connections affiliated schools have been particularly effective in improving academic performance among students who are disadvantaged or struggling. Following are examples of test score performance increases in virtual schools in which more than 50% of students are low-income, nearly one-quarter are minorities, and in the case of Ohio Connections Academy, 18% are in special education. Connections affiliated schools excel at helping diverse students of all abilities to reach their potential; nationally, more than 8% of their students qualify as gifted, and their graduates have been accepted at leading universities from Harvard to Vassar to UCLA and beyond.

Commonwealth Connections Academy in Pennsylvania, providing more than 50,000 online courses in 2010-11, demonstrated significant year-to-year improvements for its economically disadvantaged students and students with IEPs. The chart below represents significant percentage growth for economically disadvantaged students and IEP students. It is interesting to note that the growth is in different areas for each population.

Commonwealth Connections Academy (PA) Economically Disadvantaged & IEP Test Scores

	'09-'10 % Proficient or Advanced	'10-'11 % Proficient or Advanced	Percentage Growth
All Students	Math: 51.2 Reading: 60.9	Math: 55 Reading: 64.4	7.4% 5.7%
Economically Disadvantaged	Math: 43.5 Reading: 54.3	Math: 47.5 Reading: 58.4	9.2% 7.6%
IEP	Math: 27 Reading: 31.6	Math: 34 Reading: 44.9	25.9% 42.1%

CCA's 2010-11 AYP Report: <http://paayp.emetric.net/School/Overview/c21/4/7774>

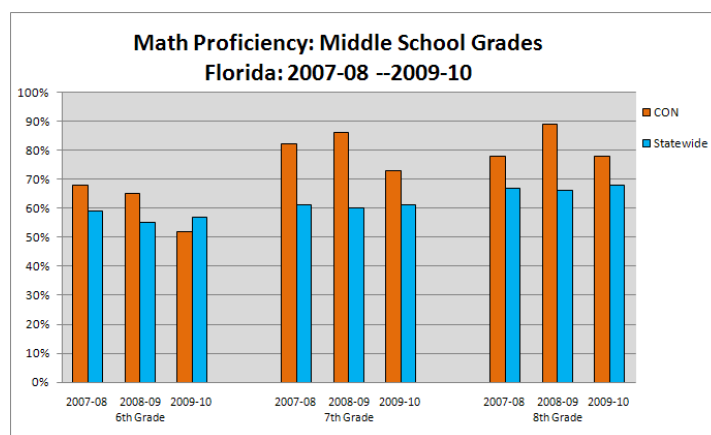
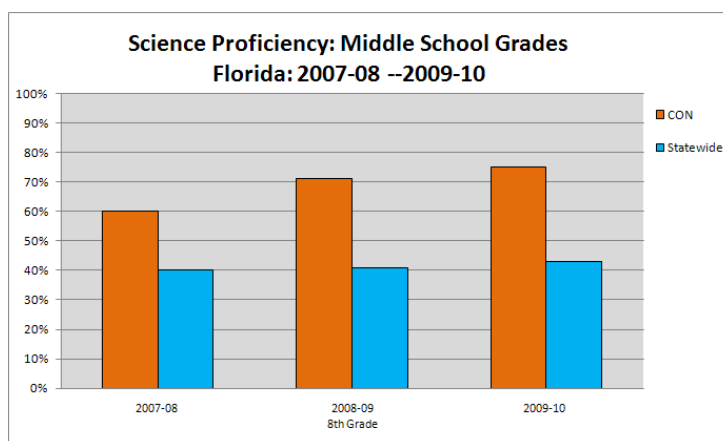
Ohio Connections Academy was the only e-school in Ohio to be named Excellent in 2010. The student percentiles below from the Ohio Achievement Test and the Ohio Graduation Tests reflect the considerable growth in student achievement over a five-year consecutive span in the Connections program. Because math scores started very low, there is a very significant increase in student test scores over time.

Ohio Connections Academy: Ohio Achievement Test

Grade Levels	05-06 % Proficient, Advanced or Accelerated		09-10 % Proficient, Advanced or Accelerated		Overall Percentage Growth	
	Math	Reading	Math	Reading	Math	Reading
3	48%	65%	66%	77%	38%	18%
4	48%	74%	62%	83%	29%	12%
5	40%	70%	54%	75%	35%	7%
6	45%	83%	69%	88%	53%	6%
7	49%	81%	63%	89%	29%	10%
8	48%	70%	52%	82%	8%	17%
10*	71%	88%	77%	89%	8%	1%
Average Growth Percentage from 2005 to 2010:					27%	10%

**10th grade is 2006-2007 as grade was not tested in 2005-2006.*

Florida Connections Academy has received a state school grade of “A” for five consecutive years (2006-present), the highest possible rating for a Florida public school, in significant part because of its record in improving the performance of students in the lowest quartile in the previous school year. For example, the graphs below show the impressive achievements of its middle school students in science and math in comparison to students statewide.



5. Provide an overview of the planned curriculum including a course scope and sequence by subject for each grade level the school plans to serve. Insert Course Scope and Sequence as Appendix A.

The Scope and Sequence, Timeline, and the Connections Program Guide for 2012-13 are included as Appendix A. The Program Guide can also be accessed <http://bluetoad.com/publication/?m=1702&l=1>.

Elementary and Middle School: The K-8 program of instruction selected by NMCA has the ability to be individualized, personalized, and delivered in a non-traditional environment to give students the best pathways to success. It will be aligned to New Mexico curriculum and Common Core State Standards. The high quality proprietary curriculum developed by the Connections Curriculum Department, integrates textbooks, instructional activities, and other content from a variety of leading publishers including Pearson, McGraw-Hill, and Zaner-Bloser. In addition to high-quality virtual and print textbook resources, the curriculum features technology-based content from providers such as Grolier Online, BrainPOP, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, and Discovery Education. Skills for Success content reinforces standards for language arts and math at each grade level. Connections' proprietary and highly effective online animated Teachlet® tutorials, which introduce challenging topics and provide interactive practice, will be also included, along with Connections proprietary interactive online tools and simulations. LiveLesson sessions, which provide for real-time web conferencing with individual and small groups of students using voice over IP, chat, electronic whiteboard, and shared web surfing, allow teachers and students to interact with one another in real time in a 'virtual classroom.' The Connections curriculum is updated regularly, based on a rigorous analysis of student performance on state testing results and internal assessments (See Definitions for more details.)

Foreign language instruction will be available at NMCA, with Spanish, Chinese, and Sign Language available to students in grades K-8. Advanced middle school students will also have the option to take French, German, Japanese, Latin, Sign Language, and Mandarin Chinese. Language courses integrate proven-effective online materials with a unique audio feature that allows teachers to hear and grade actual student speech. Courses may also include LiveLesson session instruction for maximum student-to-teacher and student-to-student interaction.

The NMCA selected curriculum will also include unique electives such as Home Life, which provides fun skill-building projects in which the whole family can participate. These activities will include cooking, crafts, sewing, home maintenance, family outings, and genealogy. New Home Life modules are added regularly, including such recent additions as of The Name of the Game: Discovering and Designing Board Games; What It Means to Be Green: Creating a Positive Impact on the Environment; Model Bridge Building; and Orienteering (a sport of navigation with map and compass).

The K-8 technology literacy courses, Educational Technology and Online Learning, will provide not only a comprehensive set of technology skills ranging from basic productivity tools to Web page development, but also reinforce national and state academic standards, online study skills, and Internet safety.

Lauching in 2012-2013 school year will be a new partnership between Connections and the Julliard School of Music. Juilliard eLearning is the world-famous conservatory's first-ever group of online courses, presenting an exciting new option for teaching music and related courses, for students in elementary, middle and high school. The curriculum will be constructed around and aligned to the National Standards. In subsequent years, courses such as music theory, music history, drama history, or dance history, may expand the course offerings. Synchronous virtual music instruction courses and virtual "master classes" may also be included.

NMCA will also provide online state assessment preparation, Skills for Success, offered for Grades 2-8, a state-specific assessment preparation and standards-based learning program. Each topic supports New Mexico Learning Standards and contains multiple assessment questions and practice. Students can choose either traditional tests or interactive games in order to go through the material. Teachers then have access to real-time progress reports that analyze deficiencies and help target assignments.

NMCA will also plan to offer to students in grades 3-8, a selection of gifted and talented courses in math, science, and language arts. With individualized lesson plans, special courses for gifted and talented students, and specialized teachers, an environment will be created where talents are nurtured and potential is realized. The gifted and talented experts will also create programs for "twice-exceptional" students, those who are gifted but also have special education needs.

High School: NMCA will provide a balanced, challenging high school experience focused on students pursuing paths that lead to success, whether via college or immediate career choice. Their personalized path is monitored along the way by the student, parents, teachers, and their school counselor. NMCA will provide a comprehensive high school program with four levels of academic coursework: Foundations, Standard, Honors, or Advanced Placement. While all four levels are designed to meet state standards and provide students a rigorous curriculum, the four levels will enable differentiation based on student needs and college and career goals. NMCA students work with their school counselor to determine appropriate course level placement. The Connections high school curriculum currently consists of approximately 250 courses, including a wide variety of electives and intensive foreign language instruction from Spanish through Mandarin Chinese.

The high school program involves more online experience than the K-8 program, as appropriate for secondary school learners. Compared with K-8, NMCA's high school program will include substantial teacher-directed instruction through synchronous and asynchronous e-learning tools. The New Mexico Learning Standards and Common Core-aligned high school curriculum integrates digital and/or print versions of textbooks from major publishers enhanced by multimedia, interactive material, discussions, and communication/conferencing tools. In addition, students will have offline assignments, projects, novels, and practice work. For a complete overview of the high school curriculum, please see the Program Guide in Appendix A.

With nearly 20 Advanced Placement courses at their fingertips, NMCA students will get a leg up on college. Across the country students enrolled in other Connections affiliated schools have exceeded the national average on performance on Advanced Placement, ACT, and SAT exams. Over two million dollars in scholarships were awarded to the graduating classes of 2011. In addition, there will be advanced coursework in STEM which will allow students to excel and have access to highly qualified teachers and experts in the STEM fields including Advanced Placement Biology, Advanced Placement Chemistry, Advanced Placement Calculus, and other challenging courses

NMCA high school courses will include extensive use of Teachlet[®] tutorials, the highly interactive, asynchronous tutorials that incorporate graphics, video, and audio to show students the concepts and ideas they will need to complete the lessons. Along with the use of LiveLesson sessions (see Appendix A. above), Teachlet[®] tutorials dramatically increase the effectiveness of the secondary school instructional model. In addition, the NMCA high school courses will incorporate graded asynchronous online discussions which are required for all students. This tool creates important opportunities for collaboration and interaction among students, increases writing skills, and provides an opportunity for a "real-world" audience.

This quality virtual high school program will also include a host of services and procedures to address credits, transcripts, and counseling. It is important for students to start early on planning for graduation and post-secondary education or the world of work. Without early planning, students run the risk of missing crucial courses that might thwart their plans or aspirations. The following important aspects of the NMCA high school program were developed with input from a national group of principals, school counselors, teachers, and parents.

Accreditation and Graduation: The Connections curriculum is accredited by AdvancED²⁴, helping to ensure that credits will transfer to other high schools as well as to colleges and/or universities both within and outside of New Mexico. In addition, in an effort to ensure the transferability of NMCA credits, NMCA will apply for accreditation through the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (NCA) similar to otherConnections affiliated schools in Arizona, Ohio, Colorado, Minnesota, and Ohio who are already accredited through NCA. Courses are also approved through the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) through a rigorous, approval process to meet requirements for initial-eligibility for college athletes (see http://www.connectionsacademy.com/Libraries/PDFs/NCAA_Approved_Course_List.pdf). The Connections curriculum uses a standard whereby one credit equals approximately 180 "hours" of instruction (approximately 6 hours per day which meets NM requirement). In order to graduate, each NMCA student must successfully complete a minimum of 24 credits/Carnegie units (24 semester hours) in the subjects and subject areas that will be outlined in the School Handbook. Units completed must meet or exceed the New Mexico graduation

²⁴ Accreditation agency serving 27,000 public and private schools and districts <http://www.advanc-ed.org/>

requirements. Graduation requirements will be set by the school's Governing Board through policy, but will be in alignment with New Mexico graduation requirements.

Instructional Delivery and Scheduling: NMCA students who enroll in the K-8 program and elect to continue into high school will notice that the high school introduces increased structure and a pacing system that encourages all the students in a single class to move forward at a similar speed. The NMCA high school program will include a significant amount of computer-facilitated learning. As noted previously, while hard copy textbooks may be provided in some courses (generally along with an enhanced online version of the text as well), students may also take courses that provide textbooks that are online only. Unlike the K-8 program with is largely asynchronous/user scheduled (which means parents set the schedule and lessons can be done in any sequence and pace), in high school the pacing for core courses often follows an asynchronous/fixed schedule (which means that the schedule is fixed and students must all move at a similar pace). This does not take away the ability of NMCA teachers to personalize the curriculum for students; however it does add accountability, structure, and the significant peer interaction that is necessary for a quality high school program.

STEM Academy: The Board plans to develop “an academy within the academy” at NMCA as evidenced by several board members in the STEM fields. NMCA will proactively reach out to community organizations with a focus on STEM, such as Explora; the National Museum of Nuclear Science and History; Bradbury Science Museum in Los Alamos, National Radio Astronomy Observatory in Socorro; Sandia National Labs and higher education institutions. It is anticipated partnerships with the above organizations would offer STEM focused field trips, LiveLesson sessions delivered by experts to NMCA students throughout the state, teacher professional development opportunities, mobile science laboratories, or other collaborative activities. Students within NMCA will be eligible to apply to the STEM academy but certain minimal competencies as evidenced by state testing will be required in order to support students' academic success and completion of the program. Critical components of the STEM academy will be a STEM focused curriculum with project based learning, real-world STEM partnerships, early college level coursework, well-prepared STEM teaching staff with a passion for science, technology, engineering, and math, and special supports for under-represented students. The STEM Academy will consist of 5 units of math, 4 units of science, community service, and a digital portfolio. Students can enroll as freshman or can enter later in their academic career if they demonstrate transcripts that show they are on track to meet the STEM Academy requirements. A STEM academy not only provides preparation for post-secondary or employment but also provides equity of access to high quality course and teachers to students throughout New Mexico. Equity and access are important to meet the needs of rural New Mexico, economically disadvantaged students, and minority students who are under-represented in the STEM fields.

Regardless of grade level, academic ability, and interest, NMCA curriculum and instruction will embrace the diversity in students throughout New Mexico supporting the cultural, linguistic, and uniqueness that each student will bring through individualization, high quality teaching, and role of the parent in the learning process

- 6. If the curriculum is not fully developed (beyond the scope and sequence and/or courses), provide a timeline outlining the curriculum development process during the school's planning year.**

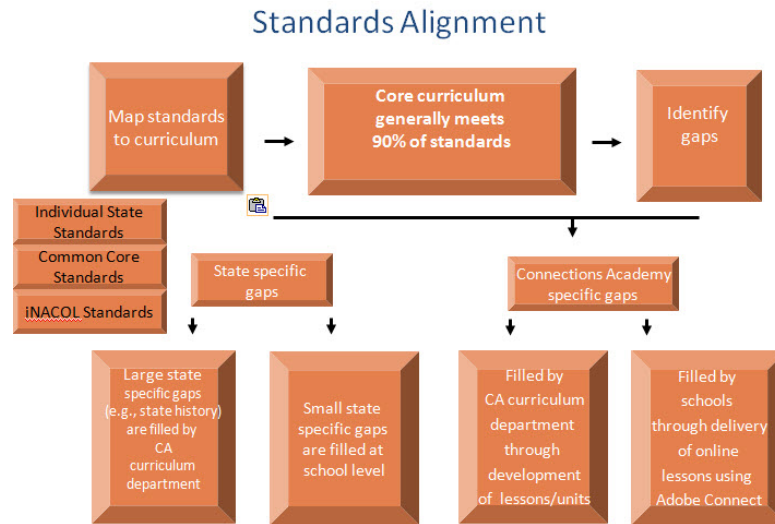
See Timeline in Appendix A.

- 7. What will the school do between the charter approval and the school's opening to develop the instructional program, and who will do it?**

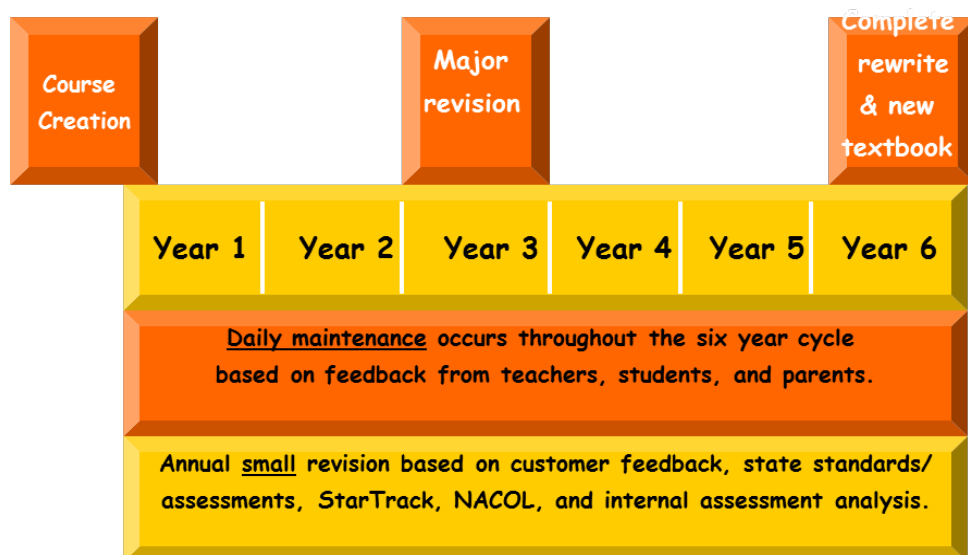
The NMCA Founding Board has the intention to contract with Connections as a curricular provider. As part of the contract to provide curriculum, alignments and further instructional development are the responsibility of Connections to insure compliance with all NM requirements. This will be overseen by the Founding Board and completed prior to school opening as provided on the timeline of development.

- 8. Provide a timeline for alignment of the curriculum with NM State Standards, if alignment has not been completed at the time the application is submitted.**

The timeline of alignment is included in Appendix A. The Connections curriculum, including assessments, will be aligned to the New Mexico state standards and Common Core. Connections is a leader on implementation of the Common Core State Standards. The alignment process is below:



As shown in the Course Development and Revision Model below, the instructional program and curriculum of NMCA will regularly undergo specific audit and revision.



G. Graduation Requirements

- 1. Identify the school's proposed requirements for graduation, if applicable, and explain any additional requirements that vary from state minimum requirements.**

The school will follow all state requirements for graduation. Currently the school will follow the requirements as outlined at <http://ped.state.nm.us/GradReqs/>

- 2. If you are seeking a waiver from mandated minimum graduation requirements, state what the waiver is and why you are seeking it. Explain how the graduation requirements will support the school's mission and ensure student readiness for college or other postsecondary**

opportunities. BE SURE TO INDICATE ANY WAIVER SOUGHT IN SECTION IIIK, BELOW, BY REFERRING TO THIS SECTION.

NMCA will not be seeking a waiver for the state graduation requirements except for Driver's Education. NMCA will seek to be placed as an approved online provider of driver's education but until that time students will be referred to other online providers. NMCA may assist students with locating driving schools/instructors but the students will be responsible for obtaining this education if desired. See Section III K.

New Mexico graduation requirements support the school's mission which is to help each K-12 student, throughout the state of New Mexico who needs an alternative to the traditional classroom for a particular time period, maximize his or her potential and meet the highest performance standards. Because of a uniquely individualized learning program, access to high quality NM-certified teachers, and high parental involvement, NMCA will achieve a goal of meeting or exceeding the high school graduation requirements. NMCA will prepare students for college and other postsecondary opportunities by a rigorous academic program including Advanced Placement and Gifted/Talented opportunities and has a school goal of increasing participation in the SAT, ACT, or AP Exam.

H. Instruction

- 1. Provide an overview of the instructional strategies and methods the school will implement that support and are aligned with the school's mission, vision, and educational plan, and are directly relevant and/or necessary to successfully implement the curriculum.**

See Section F above for detailed information. In summary, the Learning Triad and instruction at NMCA surrounds each student with the resources needed for success.

The Personalized Learning Plan: The centerpiece of instruction at NMCA is the Personalized Learning Plan (PLP), which provides for individualized instruction tailored to the learning needs of each child. The PLP is an extensive document developed at the beginning of the school year by the New Mexico-certified teacher in consultation with the student and the student's parents/guardians. This PLP is built from a combination of baseline assessments of both academic skills/knowledge and learning modalities, information gathered from the parents, and input directly from the student. Learning needs that go beyond the purely academic (such as study habits and interpersonal skills) are addressed in the PLP as well. The PLP then guides the student's course through the standards-aligned curriculum. All daily lesson plans are provided to students and families online as well as in print, directing them step-by-step through use of the comprehensive set of textbooks, trade books, manipulatives, and consumables that NMCA will ship.

Multi-Tiered Intervention: NMCA will utilize a multi-tiered intervention approach to curriculum and instruction, which ensures that individual students receive the support they need. Students who may not be successful in the standard program, Tier 1, receive additional support via the supplemental and alternative programs in Tier 2 and Tier 3 as highlighted in the adjacent chart. The NMCA staff will form a Student Support Team (SST) to focus collaboratively on the needs of students who are struggling, and facilitate tutoring and other supports using this multi-tiered approach.

NMCA students will have myriad opportunities to work together on cooperative and group learning activities, both synchronously and asynchronously. For example, teachers use the LiveLesson tool regularly to convene small groups of students together to focus on particular learning topics or projects, and may also use LiveLesson for independent student work groups to meet and collaborate on activities, chat, electronic whiteboard, and shared web surfing. The "breakout room" function of LiveLesson allows small groups of students to convene separately under the auspices of a whole-class LiveLesson. Threaded discussions on course-based message boards are also used as appropriate by grade level to provide important opportunities for collaboration and interaction among students.

Real connections are an important component at NMCA so students have the opportunity to participate regularly in both face-to-face and virtual community activities. Face-to-face activities include regular field trips and outings facilitated by the NMCA staff and Community Coordinators – parent volunteers whom NMCA supports in organizing such activities for families who live nearby. Field trips anticipated for New Mexico families

include visits to the State Capitol, museums, and parks. Technology-based activities range from a school newspaper to chess club to teacher-led threaded discussions. Since all of the collaborative online activities and communications tools are restricted for use only by members of the NMCA community, parents can feel comfortable that their children are experiencing this technology safely within NMCA.

NMCA teachers will be dedicated educators who are excited to work at a school where they can focus on what they do best—facilitate student learning. Teachers work closely with one another, collaborating and communicating regularly about their students to provide a seamless, outstanding educational program. Teachers work in collaborative teams, along with the principal, to provide administrative and academic support to each other. The majority of a teacher's time is spent working closely with students and Learning Coaches to personalize the students' instructional programs. Students who are enrolled in other Connections affiliated schools state that they have more one-on-one interaction with their online teachers than they ever had face-to-face. Teachers and students thrive with the ability to personalize instruction and reduce managerial and other non-instructional activities. They also monitor student progress, evaluate and grade their assessments, and provide organizational and instructional support to Learning Coaches on an individual basis. During this time, they become the resident expert on the student, identifying their needs, both academically and emotionally.

NMCA teachers will have the opportunity to creatively personalize their approach to each student's learning. Through monitoring and motivating students; continually assessing students' progress and modifying, enhancing, and supplementing lessons to emphasize areas where students are deficient or have a particular strength or interest, teachers will use individual or small group learning sessions via the phone, LiveLesson sessions, Message Boards, and WebMail messages to provide focused learning opportunities (see Definitions in Appendix O). NMCA teachers will have the time and ability to develop a rapport with their students and help them be as successful as possible while working with the parents.

2. Provide an explanation of how these methods/strategies are effective with your target population.

A complete learning team: At NMCA, student-learning benefits from multiple stakeholders committed to seeing them achieve success including dedicated educators and involved parents who provide total support for the student's PLP. A complete learning team working together on the student's PLP is an effective method for student success. A variety of needs can be met with this strategy from struggling learners who are academically behind to gifted and talented students who wish to get ahead.

New Mexico-licensed, highly qualified teachers: Each NMCA student has a New Mexico-certified teacher specially trained in the Connections curriculum and instructional method. Teachers work closely with each student on an one-on-one basis using innovative technology tools. The teacher is responsible for evaluating assignments and work products, providing instructional assistance, assigning and scoring assessment activities, and providing feedback on the child's performance. Based on a student's demonstrated mastery of the material, teachers add, expand or replace assignments; they also grade students in each subject for the regular report cards and make promotion or retention decisions. Depending on the need of the learner, teacher contact –via telephone, LiveLesson session, and WebMail – with the student and Learning Coach may be as frequent as several times a day, and at minimum once every two weeks depending on student age. Teachers do not wait to be contacted; they are proactive participants in their students' learning plans. In addition, NMCA families are always welcome to visit the school office/teaching center during business hours to meet with their teachers in person.

Face-to-face Learning Coaches: Each NMCA student has a Learning Coach—a parent or other responsible adult designated by the parents—who works with him or her in person under the guidance of the New Mexico-certified professional teacher. Parent involvement is a centerpiece of the NMCA concept. Whether a parent's role is as a Learning Coach, or as someone providing oversight to the Learning Coach, all parents/guardians are intimately familiar with their child's progress on a day-to-day basis. The school will provide ongoing training and support to help Learning Coaches carry out their important role while making optimum use of the available technology tools and professional teacher support to do so. In grades K-8, the Learning Coaches are directly

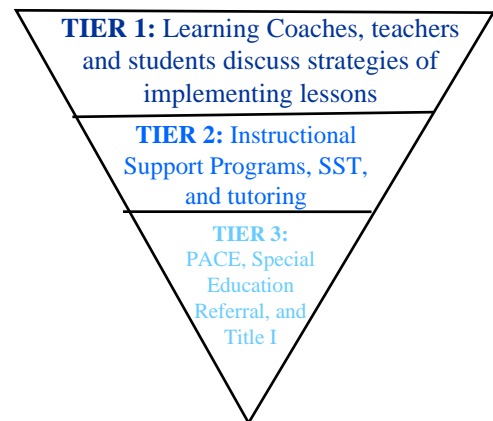
involved with students' day-to-day learning. In high school, they play an important oversight role, but students work with their teachers more independently, taking on increasing responsibility for their learning.

Expanded educational support: The NMCA Principal coordinates the work of the teachers and manages the day-to-day operation of the school, using data from Connexus to target curriculum and instructional resources toward specific student needs. Supporting the Principal and teachers in their work are the school counselor (secondary level) and Special Education Coordinator, along with Connection Education Resource Center staffed by curriculum specialists who are highly trained in distance education methodologies and specific subject areas. Curriculum specialists are available by telephone and email to the NMCA staff for assistance in addressing particular curriculum topics or in customizing curriculum for particular student needs. Connections experts in special education, gifted education, and English language learning are also on hand to assist the NMCA staff. In effect, each NMCA student has a team of experts working together to leverage the school's myriad resources – technological, instructional, and interpersonal – for his or her success.

3. Describe how the instruction will be differentiated based on identified student needs. Provide specific examples.

The Connections placement process aligns with the needs of the students NMCA wishes to serve. First, through the NMCA placement process and the school's pre- and post-test, Longitudinal Evaluation of Academic Progress® (LEAP™), scores, students will be provided with curriculum materials and instructional resources appropriate to their achievement level, with the goal of attaining at least one year's academic progress within the school year. Students who are working below grade level based on state assessment results will also benefit from PACE™ (Program for All Children to Excel), an intervention program focusing on building proficiency in reading and math skills. Parents will be notified in the fall that their students qualify for PACE, and their cooperation is secured for a series of intensive LiveLesson sessions with the student and his or her teacher focusing on areas of weakness. The child continues in the regular curriculum during the PACE program, but the LiveLesson sessions allow for focused remediation on topics likely to be problematic on the next state assessment. The PACE program has shown promising results nationally based on state test performance. NMCA will also implement the SSTAIR™ Instruction Model, a systematic approach to instruction, ensuring that all students receive the necessary level of support throughout the learning process. Beginning with identified essential skills and standards based on State and Common Core State Standards, teachers will be able to easily see what students should know and be able to do by the end of a specific grade in each of the core area subjects. The PLP will place at each teacher's fingertips all of the assessment data available for students, e.g. state test scores, pre- and post-test assessment data, participation and performance metrics, and any IEP information. In addition, an Assessment Objective Performance Report is generated displaying not only the essential skills and standards but real time student performance data. Teachers can run this report as frequently as they like to see exactly how students are progressing with regard to each of the skills and standards for that subject and grade. Based on that information, interventions will be assigned and monitored based on our three-tiered intervention system.

NMCA will utilize this three--tiered intervention approach to curriculum and instruction, which ensures that individual students receive the support they need. Students who may not be successful in the standard program, Tier 1, receive additional support via the supplemental and alternative programs in Tier 2 and Tier 3 as highlighted in the adjacent chart. The NMCA staff will form a Student Support Team (SST) to focus collaboratively on the needs of students who are struggling, and facilitate tutoring and other supports using this multi-tiered approach. Supports might include an increase in LiveLesson participation, enrollment in the instructional support programs, or other review or remediation programs such as PACE. Teachers are trained extensively in identifying students who need interventions and how to utilize the interventions.



In a virtual environment, students working below grade level will be shielded from the negative social attention that struggling students often face in a brick-and-mortar environment and will be able to concentrate on intensive learning. Finally, with its track record in experience in remediation for mastery of essential skills, NMCA's partnership with Connections, assures that NMCA will have access to all needed expertise in addressing the needs of low-achieving students.

Just as the Personalized Learning approach benefits struggling students, high achievers will also be able to thrive at NMCA. NMCA intends to implement the very robust Connections Gifted and Talented program for elementary/middle school and the Honors/AP program for high school, which together achieved a 97% satisfaction rating by parents nationally.

The placement process assures that such learners are provided with the most appropriate curriculum, pacing, and teaching approach from day one. NMCA teachers will work closely with Connections curriculum specialists and Learning Coaches to assure a steady flow of enrichment activities for students working above grade level. In a virtual environment, students are able to work significantly above grade level without fear of ostracism or other negative social repercussions that gifted students sometimes face in a more traditional school setting.

The K-8 Gifted and Talented program provides gifted students the opportunities and challenges they need to succeed while learning at their own pace. During the enrollment and placement process, students may be placed in different curriculum levels for different subjects. For example, a third grader with a high aptitude in math could be placed in a fourth-grade math course, while continuing to take third-grade-level courses in other subjects.

NMCA also will offer a focused gifted program for selected grades. The approach will cover the same educational standards as the standard offering, but with more challenging assignments covered at an accelerated pace along with additional required activities that extend the lesson topic and promote higher-level thinking and understanding. The students will be grouped together with other gifted learners and opportunities for group interaction, particularly through Live Lesson. Further, the teachers assigned to work with the gifted groups will receive additional training in gifted instruction. Gifted students at Connections in grades 3 through 8 also have the opportunity to be enrolled in specially designated gifted courses in language arts, mathematics, and science. These gifted courses allow students greater opportunities to:

- interact with the instructor and other students.
- explore grade-level content and participate in extension projects, investigations, and activities that integrate skills and promote higher-level thinking.
- participate in individualized activities that enable students to develop and apply knowledge.
- choose from a wide variety of electives and club activities to supplement learning in core subjects.

Connections also offers an exclusive online version of Junior Great Books®. Through Junior Great Books, gifted students enjoy age-appropriate works and participate in online literary inquiry and discussions with other high-ability students.

The Connections high school program offers a rigorous college preparatory curriculum that provides an opportunity for students to enroll in Honors and AP courses. High school students may choose from dozens of Honors courses and nearly 20 Advanced Placement courses, in addition to an "Independent Study" course that allows students with special interests to craft their own focused course of study. Honors courses will provide advanced students with opportunities to participate in extension projects, investigations, and activities that require integrated skills application and higher-level thinking and understanding. School counselors will carefully review each student's transcript to determine when an Honors course is appropriate. Course selection will be made in close consultation with students and their parents.

In addition to the placement and instructional methods described above, Connexus will gather very granular data on every student's performance every day. As students progress through the curriculum, they will engage in many different types of evaluations, both formal and informal. Formal assessments include quizzes, unit tests, skills checks, portfolio items, and graded discussions. Informal assessments include the variety of methods teachers use to gather ongoing feedback about student progress from both Learning Coaches and students, such

as Curriculum Based Assessments (CBAs), WebMail, LiveLessons, phone conversations, and review of student work samples.

Personalizing a student's program is an ongoing process. Students, Learning Coaches, and teachers meet throughout the year to review progress, modify the student's program, and adjust goals as needed for an ongoing, differentiated instructional approach.

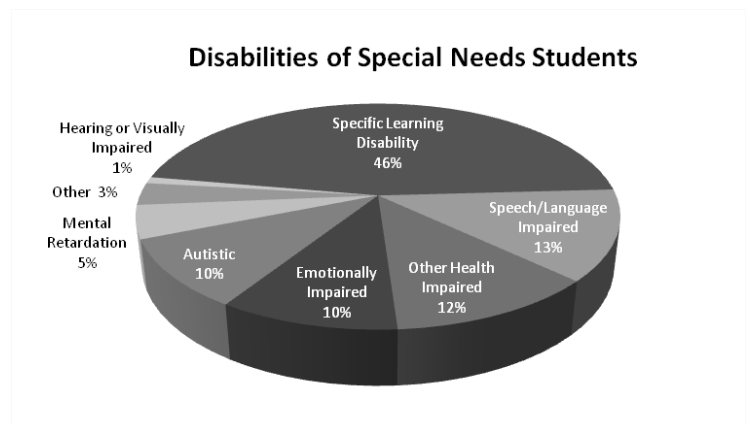
- **Placement and Course Selection.** Starting at the time of placement and course assignment, information given during the enrollment process is used to select courses based on a student's individual learning needs.
- **Regular Communication.** At the start of school, Learning Coaches and teachers establish a regular communication schedule—at least once every 2 weeks or more, depending on the needs of the student. Teachers review student progress daily and often communication with students and Learning Coaches is much more frequent; students are encouraged to contact their teachers as often as they wish or find necessary.
- **Review Student Background and Learning Styles.** Teachers, Learning Coaches, and students discuss student strengths, skill deficiencies, and previous school performance. Students complete a questionnaire to identify their unique learning style to help inform and guide the best teaching and learning approach.
- **Performance Testing.** In grades K–8, students take the LEAP test(described above) both at the beginning and end of the year. The LEAP test identifies areas of strength and need in the student's learning profile and measures student growth during the school year to help formulate learning goals and monitor student progress.
- **Set Goals.** Goal setting is based on all of the information gathered in the initial process and some initial student work samples. Teachers and Learning Coaches work together to set goals for the student and to accomplish these goals during the school year.
- **Schedule Modifications and Electives (K–8).** Once the school year gets started, teachers help personalize the learning schedule. They inquire about the student's daily routines and make adjustments to the student's online learning schedule as necessary. They also may decide to add an elective course—electives are selected many times during the year.

I. Special Populations. Describe the school’s overall plan to serve students with special needs, including those with Individualized Education Plans (IEP’s), students with Section 504 plans, and English Language Learners.

1. Special Education

- a. Explain the practices and strategies the school will employ to provide a continuum of services, and ensure students access to the general education curriculum.**

NMCA is committed to serving children with disabilities whether such children are currently or newly identified as disabled. For those not familiar with virtual schools, it may be difficult to imagine implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) for students who are participating in a virtual public charter school program from their homes. There are many similarities between the approach to special education in a virtual public school and that of a traditional school, but also some differences. Enrollment of students with disabilities in virtual schools is representative of students with disabilities within the state, both in numbers and in the disabilities served. Of the more than 30,000 full-time students served by Connections affiliated schools in 21 states in 2011-12, 13% were special education students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) or 504 Plans, a concentration of special needs learners that mirrors the traditional public school



system. Furthermore, the distribution of specific disabilities among these students is very similar to that in brick-and-mortar public school settings (see chart above that represents Connections affiliated schools nationally).

Virtual schools like NMCA open up a vast range of possibilities and options for the delivery of the full continuum of special education and related services such as speech-language, occupational, or physical therapy, psychological counseling, and other services to eligible students. Services for NMCA students with disabilities include, but are not limited to:

- consultative support to the NMCA regular education teachers to provide modification and accommodation to the general education curriculum;
- direct special education support to a student which may be provided via the telephone, Internet, LiveLesson, as well as in person;
- direct related service support (for example, speech-language, occupational, or physical therapy, psychological counseling, among others) provided face to face via computer, in homes, community sites, and therapist offices;
- related services may also include parent training, autism support, parent groups, student support groups, and itinerant hearing or vision support consistent with the student's IEP;
- ongoing progress monitoring for every student, including frequent and thorough review of student performance, attendance, and participation data as reported to the student, parent and teacher through their respective home pages;
- careful logging in the Connexus of every conversation (by phone, WebMail, LiveLesson or other means) and consultation with the student and/or parent;
- specific tracking and reporting for providers of direct/related services, with close scrutiny by the special education staff of any missed appointments or incomplete services.

Many students with an IEP may find NMCA to be an appropriate learning environment. The school will comply with all state and federal policies regarding enrollment of special education. All families applying to NMCA are asked if their child has an IEP within the last 3 years and if that IEP is currently active. Prior to the enrollment phase, Connections and NMCA staff will then review each IEP to determine the level of each student's need and consider the types of services that are required. In most cases, NMCA teachers can modify the student's program to provide the necessary accommodations. As well, NMCA's special education department works closely with the general education teachers to ensure that every student is getting what they need to access the general education curriculum.

Since NMCA will be a program focused on individualization, it may be a good fit for students with special needs. In addition to the regular placement activities, NMCA's Special Education Director (or designee) will review each Individualized Education Program (IEP), analyzing the level of functioning, educational needs, and suggested accommodations/modifications to determine how NMCA can meet the student's needs in the least restrictive environment. To support enrolled students with IEPs, NMCA will:

- conduct IEP meetings for all new students to adopt the IEP, amend the IEP, or conduct an Annual Review. In addition to being active participants in the IEP meetings, parents will be provided with Prior Written Notice detailing the decisions of the IEP team.
- hold annual reviews of the IEP including a review of student progress within the existing IEP and creation of new IEP goals.
- provide a Manager of Special Education, who will be a qualified administrator to oversee and participate in IEP meetings and all elements of the special education program.
- conduct triennial reviews, in which students may be formally reassessed, or, if no new data is needed, then a review of the records may take place.

NMCA will benefit from Connections' 10 years of experience in identifying and successfully serving students with a wide range of learning needs and styles. Connections schools on average enroll 13% students with disabilities or impairments. Training is provided throughout the year for Special Education Managers and teachers. A Connections mentor with experience in virtual school implementation of IDEA and corresponding state regulations will be assigned to the school. Extensive training for the school leadership team including the Special Education Manager on identification and service delivery for students with disabilities will be provided

by Connections.

NMCA is committed to meeting the unique needs of all enrolled students. Through high quality New Mexico certified and based teachers to the personalized approach of learning for each student and parent involvement as described in detail above, the Board is focused on student success, both academically and emotionally, for each NMCA student.

b. Describe how the school will regularly evaluate and monitor the progress and success of special education students to ensure the attainment of each student's goals set forth in their IEP's.

If NMCA suspects that a student requires special education services, the following procedures will be initiated.

- The student's teacher will utilize SSTAIR to track the student's response to the implementation of tiered Interventions by skills and standards.
- If the student continues to struggle after implementation of SSTAIR the teacher may consult with the school's Special Education Team and implement additional modifications, lesson adaptations, and alternative instructional strategies.
- The child may be referred to the Student Study Team to determine additional strategies for student success and to monitor the progress of those interventions.
- If it is determined that the student needs an evaluation, parental consent for the student evaluation will be requested via an assessment plan. Parents will be sent a copy of *Procedural Safeguards*.
- When the assessment plan is returned to NMCA, the appropriate evaluations will be arranged. The parent will be invited to the IEP team meeting to review the assessment results. The team will determine if the student has a disability, requires special education services, and which least-restrictive special education services are required.
- If a student becomes ineligible or leaves the charter school, NMCA will ensure that all appropriate paperwork is submitted and/or appropriate documentation forwarded to the new school.

Special education services will be provided in several ways including but not limited to: consultative services by phone, direct instruction via LiveLesson sessions, and LiveLesson session facilitated collaboration between the school's general education staff and special education teacher.

In order to make efficient use of staff resources, IEP meetings may be held at either the NMCA office, at another site, via teleconferencing or through LiveLesson sessions to allow all parties to participate. Specific arrangements will be made on a case-by-case basis and will be in accordance with all applicable law. NMCA will maintain responsibility for tracking and implementing IEP timelines and requirements as per the appropriate laws and regulations for charter schools.

It is also worth noting that the individualized focus of a virtual school, along with the one-on-one learning environment, often has a positive impact on students' ability to participate in the general education environment. While a special education student in a brick-and-mortar school may need to be removed from a busy classroom in order to focus, in a virtual school that same student may need little special education support to progress satisfactorily in the general education curriculum.

As a public school NMCA shall, through its policies and procedures, comply with all applicable requirements of the Individuals with Disabilities Act, 20 U.S.C. 1400 et. seq. (IDEA) and implementing regulations, including Section 300.209 of Title 34 of the Code of Federal Regulations, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 29 U.S.C. 794 (sec. 504). NMCA will provide a free appropriate public education (FAPE) to children with disabilities, including, but not limited to, identifying, evaluating, and planning educational programs, and implementing placements in accordance with those Acts.

c. If applicable, describe the school's plan for graduating students with special needs.

The school plans to have students with special needs graduate at NMCA in accordance with the terms of their IEP's. NMCA will provide a free appropriate public education (FAPE) to all students with special needs. As

with all students, NMCA's goal is for students with IEPs to graduate with a standard diploma. Teachers will make accommodations for students based on documented need and the IEP Team recommendations so students with IEPs can access the curriculum and achieve graduation requirements based on state standards. When a student with an IEP qualifies to take an alternative state assessment, and thus to receive a certificate of completion in lieu of a diploma, curriculum modifications will be made to provide that student with FAPE. NMCA will also develop transition plans for students with IEPs that meet the requirements of state and federal law. Transition plans will focus on student post high school goals as well as the student's present levels of functioning.

d. Describe the school's plan for budgeting and staffing for meeting the identified needs and educational plans for students needing special education support/services. Include how the school plans to provide ancillary staff support.

The budget includes a half time special education director and half time counselor for Year 1. In subsequent years, the budget includes a full time special education director and full time counselor. The special education director will be responsible for student IEP's and will be a key member of the IEP team. If speech language pathology is required in an IEP, then the board intends to contract with Connections for speech through its innovative, successful Live Lesson online speech therapy with a team of highly trained, licensed speech therapists. The board recognizes the difficulty in recruiting speech language pathologists especially in a rural state and will address the challenge by providing a cutting-edge "telepractice" approach endorsed by ASHA.²⁵ The school also plans to contract with local providers of special education services such as occupational therapy if needed.

2. Students with Section 504 Plans

Describe how the school will serve, evaluate, and monitor the progress and success of students with Section 504 Plans.

This Act, commonly referred to as §504 (Rehabilitation Act of 1973), is a statute designed to prohibit discrimination and to assure that disabled students have educational opportunities and benefits equal to those of non-disabled students. An Eligible Student under §504 is a student who (a) has, (b) has a record of having, or (c) is regarded as having, a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits a major life activity such as learning, self-care, walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, working, and performing manual tasks. §504 plans are typically written for students who are not receiving services under the IDEA but who require accommodations and modification to their instructional program. §504 plans may also be written for students who need modified instructional materials or assistive technology due to their disability.

Preexisting §504 plans will remain in place for new students and will be updated periodically. School personnel are alert for and will identify §504-Eligible Students and will complete a §504 plan for each identified Eligible Student. Section 504 services will be the responsibility of the charter school.

3. English Language Learner (ELL) Students

a. Explain how the school will identify English Language Learners

In a virtual school like NMCA, students with special learning needs, including ELL, enjoy individualized instruction without being isolated from the mainstream curriculum or their peers. The Connections curriculum provides quality language instruction, based on scientific research for English acquisition, in addition to quality academic instruction in reading and math. Children who are becoming fluent in English are also learning academic content in such areas as reading and math, so that they are not left behind. Children receive a planned program of English as a second language instruction (ESL) to facilitate the acquisition of English language skills and provide an instructional program appropriate to the student's developmental and instructional level. NMCA will utilize required criteria and procedures to identify English language learners. All incoming NMCA students will be required to fill out the New Mexico Home Language Survey. Based on the information in this form, students may be referred for further language testing to identify their specific level of English proficiency. The

²⁵ "Telepractice may be used to overcome barriers of access to services caused by distance, unavailability of specialists and/or subspecialists, and impaired mobility. Telepractice offers the potential to extend clinical services to remote, rural, and underserved populations, and to culturally and linguistically diverse populations." The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA)

testing and placement occurs using tests required by the state of New Mexico (such as the WIDA ACCESS Language Test) and using trained test administrators.

b. Explain how the school will provide service/supports to identified students.

A Connections curriculum specialist with ESL/LEP/ELL training or an ELL coordinator will be available to work with NMCA teachers, Learning Coaches and students to adapt the core material for ELL students and provide appropriate supplemental resources, including various technologies that can facilitate language acquisition. NMCA also anticipates that a portion of its ELL students can be very effectively served by the regular NMCA program. The individualized pace of the program allows students to move more quickly through subjects where language is not a factor and spend more time on reading and writing activities.

c. Describe how the instruction will be differentiated based on identified student needs. Provide specific examples.

To meet the needs of ELL students with less English speaking proficiency, NMCA will deploy a comprehensive English as a Second Language (ESL) instructional approach, including adapted materials for students and parents and special training for teachers certified to teach ESL. LiveLesson sessions will be used in this effort as well. The NMCA ELL Program has been designed to address the language acquisition needs of students with ELL in a virtual learning environment through the integration of technology and the support of certified teachers. Services that promote language acquisition include instructional support to help ELL students attain proficiency in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. ELL services will be provided through the use of language software, teacher consultation with Learning Coaches to guide instructional practice, teacher modification of content lessons and/or assessments, and direct instruction via LiveLesson. This hybrid model of ELL support ensures that the individual needs of ELL students are met.

d. Describe how the school will regularly evaluate and monitor the progress and success of English Language Learners.

The coordinator/curriculum specialist will play a key role in ensuring integration of students into the school community. The specialist will maintain ELL student files; provide instructional consultation and modification of lessons, assignments, and assessments to Learning Coach(es) of ELL students on a minimum biweekly basis; develop presentations and provide direct instruction to ELL students in reading, writing, listening, and speaking through LiveLesson and telephone conference; provide progress monitoring throughout the school year using various progress monitoring tools and curriculum-based measures; create and implement interventions based on student need and data from progress monitoring; monitor exited ELL students for academic progress using state-specific criteria for two years after program exit; and stay current on state legislation pertaining to ELL students. NMCA will conduct the required ongoing assessments of progress and improvements in English proficiency for its ELL students. All mandated state tests for ELL students will be administered as required by law.

e. Describe how the school plans to budget and staff itself to meet the needs of ELL students.

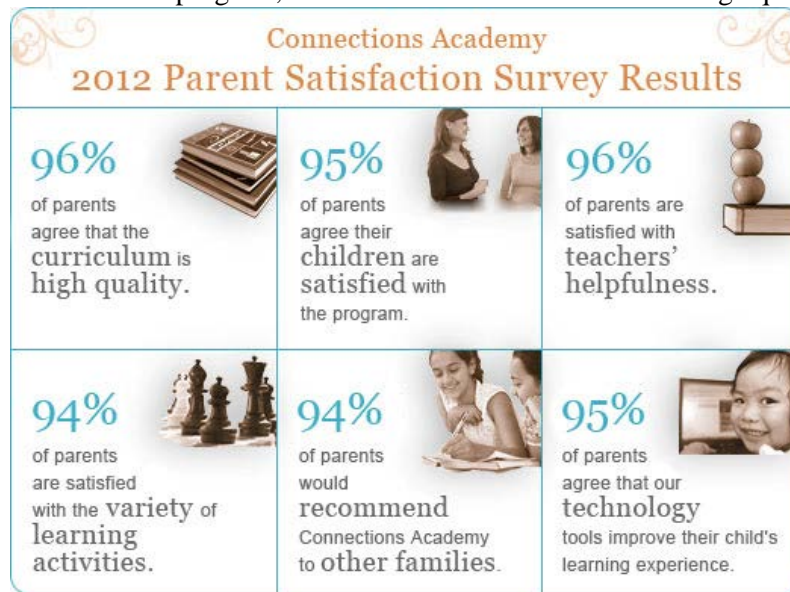
The budget includes a part time, dedicated, qualified ELL representative which will either be a bilingual teacher or ELL coordinator, based on school size. This person will be bilingual and will be provided training and ongoing support through the school's Professional Learning Community (PLC) and through a national PLC with other Connections-affiliated school representatives. The ELL representative would have other duties until a sufficient ELL % warrants full time position. The other duties will be determined when recruiting in order to determine the best combination, which would be based on the school staffing model and certification (e.g., ELL + special ed, ELL + counseling, ELL + reg ed teacher). In addition, the school will recruit and give higher priority to teaching staff with bilingual skills. Additional bilingual staff maybe needed to ensure communication with Learning Coaches and students.

J. Assessment and Accountability

- 1. Optional (Answer only if you listed organizational goals under II E. Explain how the school will measure and evaluate progress in organizational goals throughout the year. Explain how the school will measure progress towards achieving its organizational goals and how that aligns with the school's mission.**

Because parents are an integral part of the school at NMCA, an independent evaluator will be engaged to conduct an independent parental evaluation that measures items such as parent satisfaction with the curriculum, teachers, and other aspects of the NMCA program. This will be conducted, compiled, and results communicated to faculty, administration, and parents. The organizational goal for parent satisfaction is higher than 90%. The independent evaluation results along with the NM Quality of Education Survey results will be used to ensure effective parent satisfaction with the program. Faculty and administration will use these results to undergo continuous school improvement and focus on areas where improvement is needed. In order to maximize each student's potential which is NMCA's mission, parent satisfaction will be key to monitoring success of the program.

Connections affiliated schools using the Connections program score exceptionally well in third-party measures of stakeholder satisfaction. In its most recent annual survey period (February 2012), 95% of parents have been satisfied with the Connections program; 96% evaluated the curriculum as "high quality."



Based on a survey of Connections Academy families conducted in February 2012 by Leo J. Shapiro and Associates.

In order to measure the enrollment goal in STEM, enrollment calculations will be conducted annually and reported to the Governing Board in an annual report. If the percentage of total enrollment is not meeting the goal, then additional recruitment efforts by staff, faculty, and the school will be increased. A STEM focus is part of the mission of NMCA.

- 2. In addition to the state-mandated Standards Based Assessment, identify any valid and reliable formative and/or summative assessments, universal screening tools and progress monitoring tools the school will use to determine whether students are meeting academic goals. Identify the grade levels at which the assessment(s) will be used with an anticipated schedule or frequency of assessing.**

NMCA shall adhere to the same accountability measures, administer the same state assessments and follow the same proficiency measures as all public charter schools in New Mexico, in addition to using its own internal assessment tools. The Student Achievement schematic and discussion that follows illustrate how NMCA's various assessments combine with top quality curriculum and instruction to improve student achievement and maintain a high level of accountability. NMCA's assessment efforts begin with a thorough placement process and progress review, including online and offline placements tests where indicated, which help to customize the student's academic program and formulate the PLP. NMCA will also utilize ongoing online and offline assessments to measure student progress on the curriculum, and a technology-based assessment tool to measure student gains over the school year. Specifically, NMCA shall use the following assessments and standardized tests to measure pupil progress:

- **Placement:** Prior to the beginning of the academic year (or the student enrollment date when later) each new student will take part in a placement process that includes review of previous school records and state assessment results, review with parents, and use of placement tests as needed. Placement specialists then determine a grade level placement in review with parents/guardians.
- **Yearly progress:** Students take a technology-facilitated pre- and post test known as the Longitudinal Evaluation of Academic Progress (LEAP) administered within the first month or so of school and at the end of the school year. LEAP is used to provide essential diagnostic information for PLP development and instructional planning, to provide an “early read” on a student’s ultimate performance on state-mandated tests, and to report key accountability data on student progress over the academic year.
- **Ongoing informal assessments:** As students progress through the curriculum, they will engage in several formative assessments that tap into all levels of student thinking. Such assessment activities include: scored daily assignments, daily “checks for understanding” requiring students to apply and integrate new skills in a thoughtful manner, and regular online quizzes and tests to measure understanding of newly presented material. Other more subjective assessment activities include written journal responses and group discussions.
- **Unit assessments and offline and online portfolio assignments:** Each subject in the NMCA curriculum is broken into logical units of study. Throughout each unit, students are required to complete a series of offline and online assessments. Offline assessments may include written compositions, science lab reports, short answer questions and essays, book responses, and a variety of work samples, which will make up a student’s portfolio. These assessments require direct teacher evaluation. Online assessments include quizzes and a unit test. While the quizzes are brief and frequent (occurring after every third or fourth lesson), the unit tests are more comprehensive and occur at the end of an entire unit. Online assessments provide students and families with immediate objective feedback, while offline assessments provide valuable reflection and expertise from NMCA’s certified program teachers. Student progress reports and grades will ultimately include a balanced combination of quizzes, tests, work samples (portfolio items), and teacher feedback.
- **Curriculum-Based Assessments:** NMCA uses curriculum-based assessments (CBAs) as a quick and effective way to gather, through telephone conversation, additional information on students’ understanding of concepts. Teachers conduct two types of CBAs: diagnostic curriculum based assessment (DCBA) to pinpoint strengths and weaknesses in student mastery of concepts, and verification curriculum based assessment (VCBA) to gauge authentic student learning of concepts previously graded as successfully completed with scores of B or higher.
- **State-mandated assessments:** NMCA is dedicated to meeting and exceeding all of New Mexico’s goals and grade level requirements. At in-person, proctored locations, NMCA students will participate in proficiency tests such as the New Mexico Standards Based Assessment (SBA) and/or the graduation exit exam (High School Graduation Assessment) depending upon grade level. Results of these assessments will be reported through the New Mexico Department of Education as well as communicated directly to NMCA parents. Alternative assessments will be provided such as the New Mexico Performance Assessment (NMAPA) for state testing or the Alternate Demonstration of Competency (ADC) for high school graduation. The school leadership will also include the results of



the state mandated testing in the evaluation of the school's overall performance and its reports to the Governing Board and the New Mexico Public Education Commission.

- *School assessment policies:* Responsibility for monitoring, evaluating, adjusting, and adhering to the school's assessment policies and practices will follow a traditional model. Teachers will have primary responsibility for administering assessments and providing feedback to administrators. The school principal will oversee the assessment program and work with education specialists in evaluating and making recommendations for changes. Connections will further oversee the assessment component in its schools, and will make recommendations to the school principal and the NMCA Board. The NMCA Board will have ultimate responsibility for ensuring that the school is fulfilling the expectations and obligations under charter school law, the charter, and NMCA Board approved school policy.
- *Baseline achievement data:* To the extent that state standardized test results are available for an incoming student, these results will be integrated into that student's basic information in Connexus; likewise, results for state standardized tests that students take while enrolled at NMCA will be included in Connexus, along with internal pre- and post-test data. This data will be used to track student progress from year to year and within the year.

3. Describe how the school will use multiple valid and reliable assessments to evaluate student performance and proficiency, and how the results will be used to improve teaching and learning.

Connexus captures all needed data about students, their attendance and their performance. This data is accessible for viewing by school staff, teachers, and parents/guardians on a moment-by-moment, day-by-day basis. In addition, this data will be used for formal reporting to various stakeholders on the students' – and the school's – instructional progress. The following are the assessments that will be used to evaluate student performance and proficiency and how the results will be used to improve teaching and learning:

- *Grade books and data tools:* Both Learning Coaches and teachers will have access to an electronic grade book that will track all results and serve as the basis of changes in the student's learning plan. A key aspect to NMCA assessments is the detailed feedback that is provided by the teachers beyond the simple right/wrong grading of many traditional assessment vehicles. NMCA will also use a variety of advanced data visualization tools that will provide students, parents, teachers, school administrators, institutional education partners, regulators and researchers with views of how students are performing.
- *All required reports:* Connexus is fully customizable to meet district and state reporting needs in the form best suited for integration with existing information systems. For example, a School Accountability Report Card (SARC) will be developed annually by NMCA staff and will be made available to the NMCA Board, parents, Commission members, and members of the public by posting it on the school's public website.
- *Ongoing communication with Learning Coaches:* At NMCA, communication with parent and Learning Coaches will be frequent and purposeful throughout the school year and communicate formative and summative progress. Communication will serve three main objectives—to help the teacher monitor the student's progress, to keep parents “in the loop” with current school happenings, and to help NMCA grow and improve from parent feedback. Scheduled phone calls, LiveLesson sessions, and face-to-face meetings can all be used to help teachers gauge student's mastery of concepts and to determine appropriate instructional recommendations. The student's teacher will conduct follow-up conversations by parent-teacher/teacher-student conferences, at least on a weekly basis using WebMail messages, LiveLesson sessions, feedback when grading, Message Board postings, phone conversations, and/or face-to-face interactions. Students should interact synchronously with a teacher at least once every two weeks although typically it is much more frequent. In the secondary model the student's six subject teachers and homeroom/advisory teacher may rotate this responsibility among them. The dialogue will occur by telephone or in person to ensure progress is being made. NMCA will regularly distribute important information through school newsletters, the home page, and “Must Read” WebMail messages to ensure parents are informed. Communication will

continually make students and our practices stronger and more effective. All communication between teachers and parents or students is documented in the log section of Connexus, which allows for detailed tracking of interactions as well as seamless support for students and their families from multiple individuals.

Students should expect work to be graded, based on the assignment and format, from immediately to up to one week, with the average being 24-hour turnaround time. In addition to formal graded assignments, teachers will continuously monitor student work via Connexus, noting performance on machine-graded quizzes and checks for understanding and reaching out to students via synchronous telephone or LiveLesson based CBAs to verify student work and/or diagnose difficulties in mastering discrete skills and concepts. Connexus will track teacher response time and teacher-student/teacher-parent communications, providing the school Principal with rich, actionable data on this key aspect of teacher performance.

NMCA will also use the SSTAIR method as its instructional model, which relies on student assessment data for continuous monitoring of student progress. It is designed to ensure the following:

- enhance the multi-tiered instruction model;
- identify essential skills and standards by subject/grade level;
- identify how and where these essential skills and standards are assessed within the program;
- provide a Response to Intervention model;
- provide access to and analysis of data to determine mastery/proficiency;
- incorporate data driven decisions throughout instruction;
- maximize use of the instructional support programs, resources, and data; identify tiered interventions for non-mastered/proficient skills and standards, and identify students' response to the implemented interventions.

Connections takes academic integrity very seriously and works to ensure the authenticity of student work via formal and informal assessments including: Curriculum-Based Assessments, Teacher Involvement, LiveLesson sessions, and a Plagiarism Check Tool. Websites are actively monitored that post answers and tests.

Connections is increasing the use of randomization within the assessments.

- *Curriculum-Based Assessments:* The Connections program uses curriculum-based assessments (CBAs) as a way to gather, through telephone conversation, additional information on students' understanding of concepts.
- *Teacher Involvement:* Teachers are an integral part of the assessment process and they constantly observe where students are in the curriculum (what lessons have been completed) and review this information against the assessment results. If something seems unusual, the student (family) is contacted.
- *LiveLesson sessions:* Students and teachers interact as a class in real time through Connections synchronous online LiveLesson sessions. Teachers may use these regularly scheduled lessons to assess students' engagement and content knowledge.
- *Plagiarism Check Tool* – compares student work to existing work housed online.

There are many types of assessments to insure multiple measures of accountability. All of these assessments work together for the school to improve student learning.

4. Describe the corrective actions the school will take if it falls short of achieving student academic achievement expectations or goals at the individual (remediation/at-risk students) AND school-wide levels. Explain what would trigger such corrective actions, who would be responsible for implementing them, and how the school will assess their effectiveness.

Promotion and Graduation Criteria: To be promoted to the next grade, students in grades K–8 must demonstrate adequate progress in their overall course of study and proficiency on their state tests. Additionally, students will need to successfully complete their Language Arts and Mathematics courses. (Certain students with IEPs may be excluded from this requirement.) A final decision to retain a student due to inadequate progress or lack of proficiency will be made on a case-by-case basis by the school principal, parent, and teacher in accordance with New Mexico's promotion regulation.

To graduate and receive a diploma from NMCA, the Board will be asked to approve a policy that requires that a student must be enrolled during the semester immediately prior to graduation, and earn a minimum of 5 of the credits (or 10 courses) required for graduation at NMCA (or another Connections affiliated school), with at least 1.5 of these credits (or 3 courses) earned at NMCA in the semester immediately prior to graduation. Each student must successfully complete a minimum of 24 credits (Carnegie units -24 semester hours) to graduate, as shown above. Any additional applicable graduation requirements, as well as any updates to the promotion and graduation policies, will be included in the School Handbook.

Academic Integrity: Because NMCA’s assessment program will begin with solid baseline inherent in Connexus and then integrate a variety of forms of assessments – offline as well as online, qualitative as well as quantitative, direct and indirect, informal and formal – the school will have multiple opportunities to ensure that students are doing their own work and are not being inappropriately “helped” by a parent or other family member. Adherence to NMCA’s academic honesty expectations is provided by the Parent/Legal Guardian (Caretaker) Acknowledgement which will require signed assurances of academic integrity – and the unique user name and password provided to each NMCA student distinctive from that of parents and Learning Coaches to ensure proper access to online assessments.

The variety of assessment forms also promotes assessment security. A student’s work at NMCA will begin with a placement process, providing the teacher with a solid baseline against which to compare online assessments to follow. Many of NMCA’s ongoing assessments will take the form of student portfolio work products (including work in the student’s handwriting) sent in by physical mail or submitted electronically directly to the teacher for in-depth review by the teacher. These will be combined with frequent online quizzes, periodic online and offline unit tests, and the standardized pre- and post-test, which will be compared against the student’s portfolio samples to detect any mismatches. Finally, NMCA teachers will be specially trained in telephone and WebMail message questioning techniques to evaluate student mastery of concepts. Students and parents suspected of inappropriate assessment behavior will be confronted immediately and subjected to standard disciplinary action.

School-wide assessment strategies: In addition to assessment of students, NMCA will have in place a variety of measures for determining the success of the overall school program and the school staff. NMCA will have very specific and measurable objectives for success, based upon the academic progress of its students and the school’s performance on several non-academic measures. The school administration will use Connexus to watch each of these variables closely to monitor the school’s overall success. The school principal, in collaboration with the staff and with the Connections support team, will develop a list of measurable annual school goals that are aligned to the charter goals and are designed to ensure continuous school improvement. The NMCA Governing Board will approve these school goals and the performance of the principal and staff is evaluated in part by using the school goals.

5. Describe how the school will report student achievement results to parents, the school’s Governing Body, the school’s authorizer and the broader community.

Periodic progress reports and external evaluations: The school will account for its progress against its student performance measures to all stakeholders, including parents/guardians, the New Mexico Public Education Commission, and the community periodically. In addition, the NMCA Governing Board may contract with an outside evaluator (such as a university) to assess the school’s overall performance against its mission on a longer-term basis.

Annual goal report: At least once annually, the school will account for its progress against student performance measures to the NMCA Governing Board for presentation at a public board meeting.

II. Organizational Plan and Governance

A. Governing Body Creation/Capacity

1. **Summarize the key components of your governance structure, including without limitation, the roles and responsibilities of the governing body, number of members, length of terms, offices to be created, committees, grounds for removal from office, and relationship with the school's administration. Explain how and when the governing body will develop its governing documents, or "bylaws" if not submitted with application. If complete, attach governing documents as Appendix "B".**

The New Mexico Connections Academy (NMCA) Founding Board will become the Governing Board upon approval of the charter. The roles and responsibilities of the NMCA Governing Board include, but are not limited to:

1. Protect the legal interests of the charter school and adhere to all applicable laws as required by NMSA 1978, 22-8B-4(A).
2. Ensure that the charter is achieving its vision and mission
3. Set Governing Board policy
4. Govern the operations of the school but leave daily operations to the head administrator
5. Exercise sound legal and ethical practices and policies
6. Manage liabilities wisely
7. Advocate good external relations with the community, school districts, media, neighbors, parents, and students
8. Establish a finance committee and audit committee as outlined in section IV and per NMSA 1978 22-8-12.3.
9. Hire and evaluate the administrator annually
10. Hire contractors, negotiate service agreements, and hold contractors accountable for performance under such agreements
11. Comply with state and federal reporting requirements
12. Practice strategic planning
13. Ensure adequate resources and manage them effectively
14. Assess the organization's performance including monitoring achievement of accountability framework.
15. Attend mandatory training annually that complies with the Charter Schools Act and that is relevant to effective leadership of the charter school.
16. Negotiate and enter into a performance contract with the Public Education Commission

Upon approval of the charter, the NMCA founding members will embrace the roles and responsibilities of an effective charter school Governing Board.

The Governing Board will be comprised of no fewer than five (5) and no more than (9) voting members serving staggered terms of 1, 2 or 3 years. No member of the Governing Board of New Mexico Connections Academy shall be an employee or independent contractor or otherwise be compensated by NMCA except as specifically allowed by the conflict of interest provisions set forth in applicable New Mexico and federal law (see Appendix G).

Once the new Governing Board is seated, the Governing Board members will choose officers as per the bylaws. The officers of the Governing Board shall be a President, a Treasurer, and a Secretary. The Governing Board may also have a Chairperson of the Board, one or more Vice Presidents, Assistant Secretaries, Assistant Treasurers, and the Governing Board may determine other such officers with such titles from time to time.

Please see Appendix B for the by-laws that outlines the number of members, length of terms, offices, committees, grounds for removal, and relationship with school administration. Upon approval of the charter, the by-laws will be reviewed for adoption by the Governing Board.

2. Describe the expertise of the founding member(s) and his/her/their qualifications and/or experience that is relevant to developing a charter school plan and implementing a charter school's operations.

NMCA Founding Board members are parents, educators, business and community leaders who are committed to bringing a high-quality, highly accountable virtual K-12 public school to New Mexico. Well-known and respected community leaders, business leaders, parents and educators are keys to a strong founding board. Each Founding Board member brings unique skills and expertise to the proposed charter school. NMCA is a statewide school and as such the Founding Board members have community ties across the state. Individual qualifications enhance the collective profile of the Founding Board.

The Founding Board currently consists of 7 members representing parent, community, business, and education interests. In addition, there is a wide range of expertise on the Founding Board demonstrating the capacity for initial start-up operations and the successful launch of the school for Fall 2013. The skill set of the Founding Board includes educational, legal, financial, real estate, STEM, and board governance experience.

The charter application will serve as a blueprint by which the Founding Board will begin the start-up process. The Founding Board will apply to be a Board of Finance and will execute a charter contract with the Public Education Commission as described in NMSA 1978 22-8B-9 (2012) within 30 days of approval. The planning year will consist of vision and operational planning for successful launch including identifying a facility in collaboration with PSFA, hiring a principal, attending board trainings, and recruiting/training high quality, innovative teachers by Fall 2013.

3. Provide a list of your proposed initial governing body members and describe the expertise on the governing body that demonstrates capacity to initiate the opening of the charter school.

- Governor Terry Aguilar, Santa Fe:** Governor Terry Aguilar is Governor of the San Ildefonso Pueblo and is a leader in his community. He joined the Founding Board because he knows that many students are struggling and need additional educational options. There are students in his tribe who are drop-outs due to teen pregnancy, bullying, and at-risk behaviors and believes that virtual education through NMCA could be another option for these students. In addition to serving as Governor of the Pueblo, Governor Aguilar is a licensed attorney. His legal background and perspective of a Pueblo Governor will bring an important perspective to the Founding Board and will help implement the vision and mission of the school.
- Senator Mark Boitano, Albuquerque:** Since 1997 Senator Boitano has served in the New Mexico Citizen Legislature. He helped craft and sponsor the 1999 Charter Schools Act that allowed for the creation of charter schools statewide. In 2000, Senator Boitano introduced legislation to create the N.M. Cyber Academy. In addition he has introduced measures in the Legislature to create teacher, parent and student compacts, increase high school graduation requirements, and implement greater local governance in the public school system. Senator Boitano graduated from Regents College and received a B.S. in Political Science and Sociology. Currently a TOP 3% of all RE/MAX agents realtor, Senator Boitano is an International Award Winning Realtor, a Company Top Producer and a former Board of Realtors "Rookie of the Year". He has been honored by the *Association of Commerce and Industry* as a Business Star and received a Leader Award in 1999, and again in 2001, from the *Albuquerque Chamber of Commerce*. Senator Boitano brings his knowledge and expertise of real estate, school facilities, charter school law, education policy, and business to the Founding Board of New Mexico Connections Academy.
- Patrick Chavez, Bernalillo County:** Mr. Chavez is a civil engineer for Wilson and Company, a national engineering and architectural firm. Mr. Chavez is a LEED Accredited Professional who has over 12 years of engineering experience with varied functions in a wide range of water and wastewater related projects. Having served as a Construction Inspector at Sandia National Laboratories, a Project Engineer for waterline design, and Project Manager for reuse water applications, Mr. Chavez received his B.S. and M.S. from the University of New Mexico in Civil Engineering. Mr. Chavez knows the importance of education in

achieving your goals and is proud to be the first member of his paternal family to graduate from college. As a professional in the STEM field and as a parent who is interested in educational options for his daughter, Mr. Chavez adds a unique perspective on the Founding Board.

4. **Yvonne Duhigg, Las Cruces:** Ms. Duhigg is the Owner/Broker of Jardin Homes, a real estate property management company since 2000 in Las Cruces, NM. Ms. Duhigg has broad experience in managing multiple properties including single and multi-family residences that cater to a variety of income levels and lifestyles. Ms. Duhigg is the parent of a second-grader and believes that parents need choices in education including virtual education. As a small business owner, Ms. Duhigg brings with her the knowledge of not only real estate, but operating a success full business; an asset to the operation of a charter school.
5. **Paul Gessing, Albuquerque:** Mr. Gessing has served as President of the Rio Grande Foundation, New Mexico's only free market think tank, since 2006 in Albuquerque, NM. His work has appeared in newspapers and journals such as The Wall Street Journal, Forbes, National Review Online, The Washington Post, The Washington Times, the Albuquerque Journal, and other media. His work with the Foundation has focused on public policy with an emphasis on improved transparency, and accountability for state and local government throughout New Mexico. An MBA graduate of the University of Maryland and B.A. in political science graduate from Bowling Green State University, Mr. Gessing brings his knowledge and expertise of public policy and business background to the Founding Board of New Mexico Connections Academy. Mr. Gessing will be a valuable resource to the Founding Board with his focus on accountability and business.
6. **Dr. Patrick Lopez, Albuquerque:** Dr. Lopez is the Executive Director of Explora, a hands-on Science Museum. He is a long time educator in New Mexico who has served as a teacher, Title I coordinator, Principal of Bernalillo High School, and Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources and Assessment. He received his teaching credential in 1979 in science, a Masters of Arts from University of New Mexico, and a Masters of Education and Doctorate in Education from Harvard Graduate School of Education. His dissertation was entitled "Mexican Americans and Graduation from College". He has received many awards such as the Outstanding Young Man in America (1984-85) and recipient of the National Hispanic Scholarship (1988-89). Dr. Lopez currently serves as a strategic planning advisor for the Lawrence Hall of Science, as a governing member of the Association of Science and Technology Centers and a board member of the National Coalition for Science after School. Under his leadership, Explora won a National Medal of Honor for Museums at the White House in 2010. Dr. Lopez's education background, experience in human resources and management, and STEM background will add a great diversity of talents to the NMCA Founding Board.
7. **Carlo Lucero, Albuquerque:** Mr. Lucero is the Owner/President of Sparkle Maintenance, a 400 employee commercial janitorial and building maintenance service that is the only firm headquartered in New Mexico to be GS-42 Certified ensuring a "green" cleaning program. Sparkle Maintenance has received numerous awards, one of the most notable as the Hispanic Business Magazine Top 500 List of Largest US Hispanic Owned Firms. Mr. Lucero received his BS. and his M.S. from the University of New Mexico in Economics, Finance, and Management. Currently serving on the Albuquerque Hispano Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors (Chairman of the Board 2008), Greater Albuquerque Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors and Chairman of Military Affairs & Public Safety Committees, the New Mexico 8a & Minority Business Association Board of Directors, and the Albuquerque Public Schools Superintendent's Business Advisory Committee, Carlo. Carlo is well versed on the importance of education in a quality workforce and is interested in additional educational options to assist students in their educational goals. Carlo's extensive experience in leadership, business, finance, and board governance will be an asset to the Founding Board of New Mexico Connections Academy.

- 4. Describe how future governing body members will be selected as vacancies arise. Enumerate the qualifications desired for members that will assure the school's governance is competent to operate a public school.**

Governing Board composition: The Governing Board members and its officers will be selected in keeping with the description in this section, NM statute and regulation (NMSA 1978, 22-8B-8(1); 6.80.4.9 (H) NMAC, and draft bylaws (See Appendix B). The Founding Board will become the Governing Board upon approval of the charter. The Governing Board shall, in selecting future Governing Board members, ensure potential members are committed to the school's mission. In addition, the Governing Board will evaluate the potential members' credibility and integrity within the community. The Governing Board will also consider members' professional, educational, and practical experience and will actively recruit Governing Board members who have professional skills that complement or add to the existing Governing Board composition. When recruiting Governing Board members, efforts will be made to find Governing Board members who reside throughout the state, in order to provide input from the larger school community that the school intends to serve. In addition, NMCA will recruit Governing Board members to insure that parent, community, and educator positions are filled upon a vacancy. New Governing Board members will be voted in by the majority membership on the NMCA Governing Board. NMCA will look for members with expertise in the area of business, law, fields related to our focus on STEM, finance and accounting, education leadership, parental perspective, and programmatic experience.

B. Governing Body Training and Evaluation

- 1. Describe your plan for ensuring the governing body receives the required training and how the school will include these costs in the budget. How will you ensure that the training provided is relevant to the school's governance and oversight requirements?**

The Governing Board plans to attend all trainings that are required by the NM Public Education Department (22-8B-5.1) to ensure that the Governing Board has ongoing knowledge about governance, oversight requirements, department rules, policies and procedures. In addition, the Governing Board will allocate funds to attend the annual conference and trainings sponsored or certified by the New Mexico Coalition for Charter Schools.

Additional training may also be acquired to ensure smooth operations and effective board practices conducted by a reputable third party vendor. Other trainings may include Effective Board Governance of Public Charter Schools online training module series as well as state-specific training provided in person, via the Internet, and in print. Training topics may include charter school basics, responsibilities, conflict of interest, effective meeting management, quality Board leadership and policy development. In addition, NMCA Governing Board members will have the opportunity to participate in various regional and national conferences to network with other charter board members and further their development as effective board members.

Function 2300 of Central Administration section (Object 55811-55812) of the budget includes funds for board training and travel. Local training is included in the budget in Year 1 and out-of-state conference training is included in the budget in subsequent years.

- 2. Provide a plan for an annual self-evaluation of the governing body that reflects an evaluation of its overall effectiveness.**

The Governing Board will engage in ongoing reflection of its effectiveness. Annual Satisfaction Surveys will be administered via a third-party survey firm to conduct annual parent and staff satisfaction surveys. In addition, student, parent, and teacher input will be gathered daily via the Five Star Evaluation System for lessons. The results of these surveys will be used to drive improvements to the curriculum, instruction, and program. The results will be analyzed and an annual report presented to the Governing Board and/or Principal. In addition, the principal will prepare an annual report of progress towards the Student Performance Goals as outlined in the charter and will present to the Governing Board. These measures will guide the Governing Board into making strategic decisions and determine the school's progress in meeting its goals. Reflecting on annual progress will allow the Governing Board to perform an annual self-evaluation of the effectiveness of the Governing Board and the charter school.

C. Leadership and Management

1. Describe how the governing body will monitor operational, financial, and academic outcomes on an ongoing basis to ensure that the school is meeting its mission and vision.

Operational Outcomes: Governing body performance including compliance with all applicable laws, rules and terms of the charter contract are part of the performance framework and contract with the Public Education Commission. Monitoring the operational outcomes of the charter school is a responsibility of the Governing Board and will be monitored at each Governing Board meeting under the principal report. However, the Governing Board will not engage in the daily operations of the school and will delegate that authority.

The Governing Board will ensure that all personnel undergo required background checks and other investigations before they are employed in the school. The Governing Board may, at any time, request that the Principal promptly investigate and take action to address any complaints or concerns regarding the performance or conduct of any Teacher. The Principal shall provide a prompt report to the Governing Board on any and all actions taken in response to such a request.

The Governing Board will ensure that the school adheres to the same health, safety, civil rights, and disability rights requirements as are applied to all public schools operating in New Mexico. The Governing Board will also be responsible to ensure that the public as well as students, parents and employees have the ability to communicate appropriately with the Governing Board in keeping with state law and regulation.

Financial Outcomes: The Governing Board is responsible for the financial outcomes of NMCA. A financial audit will be conducted annually by the NMPED which will be reviewed carefully by the Governing Board to determine areas of improvement. The financial performance and sustainability of the charter school is part of the Performance Framework contract between the charter school and the Public Education Commission. All audit results will be reported to the Governing Board and the Governing Board will make determinations as to financial management. In addition, the Governing Board will establish both an Audit and Finance Committee. Under the Governing Board's direction, business matters, including development of budgets, creation of financial systems, and fiscal and student attendance reporting, will be carried out by the Certified Business Official under guidance from the Finance and Audit Committees. The Certified Business Official will also act in an information and advisory capacity to the Governing Board on fiscal issues. The Governing Board shall negotiate and oversee contracts for services such as financial accounting, legal services, and other services. The Governing Board will monitor closely all financial transactions at each Governing Board meeting to insure that the school is meeting its financial obligations. (See Section IV Budget for more details on financial planning).

Academic Outcomes: The Governing Board is responsible for the Academic Outcomes /Performance Framework included in the charter application and contract with the Public Education Commission. This includes student academic performance, student academic growth, achievement gaps between subgroups, attendance, recurrent enrollment, post-secondary readiness, and graduation rate (See Section II Education Plan for the goals for each of these categories.). The Governing Board will monitor all decision-making under the lens of academic outcomes for students enrolled at NMCA. The mission of NMCA is to help each K-12 student, throughout the state of New Mexico who needs an alternative to the traditional classroom for a particular time period, maximize his or her potential and meet the highest performance standards through a uniquely individualized learning program, access to high quality NM-certified teachers, and high parental involvement. Improving academic outcomes is one of the primary missions of NMCA and will be monitored closely. Each Governing Board meeting will include a Monthly School Report which will include a snapshot of academic outcomes such as number and qualifications of teachers, number of students enrolled by subgroup, enrollment/retention rate, grade distribution, average attendance rate, average performance rate, average participation rate, contacts per week, and number of students on target, on track, approaching alarm or in alarm status. This report will be produced monthly by the Connexus system which allows close monitoring of academic progress. Data on academic performance goals can also be monitored daily by the principal and is a primary function of the position. Monitoring academic outcomes will not just come once a year but will be an ongoing process. An annual report will also be produced so that more in depth analysis by the Governing Board can be conducted and continuous school improvement can be engaged.

2. Identify the qualifications and leadership characteristics the governing body will seek when employing the head administrator. Describe the job search process and timelines for this process. If the proposed head administrator is a founder or already identified, provide a summary of his/her background and qualifications for this position.

The school principal will be the head administrator and leader for the school. The NMCA Governing Board will require an advanced degree and an administrative credential with a minimum of 3 years management or administrative experience (See Appendix C for Head Administrator Job Description). A former principal who is technologically literate with good communication skills is ideal. The principal needs to be able to build consensus and inspire teachers to teach, students to learn and parents to engage in their child's learning while following the mission of the school. Working from the NM teaching center, the Principal will manage teachers as they use the phone and Internet to consult regularly with learning coaches and students, ensuring that each child successfully completes his/her instructional program. The Principal is responsible for the overall school operation working with parents, students, support staff and certified teachers who "virtually" facilitate the student instructional program. Other key responsibilities include the following:

- Manage the implementation of the proven Connections curriculum and school operation protocols.
- Ensure that teachers exhibit and maintain a high level of professionalism, instructional support and customer service.
- Ensure the academic success of individual students by utilizing all levels of academic support available and by maintaining a high level of communication with parents to deliver program information and address individual student needs.
- Manage relationships with the Public Education Department and the Public Education Commission, and stay current on the state's policies, procedures and legislation, including specific special education procedures, etc.
- Meet regularly with the Governing Board of New Mexico Connections Academy.
- Provide the Governing Board with regular written and verbal reports and updates, as well as maintaining a high level of communication with other appropriate Connections staff.
- Assist teaching staff with implementing any program changes and/or new software application introductions.
- Exhibit high quality communication with the Connections school staff, students and families.
- Oversee newsletter production, phone calls, regional meetings, and surveys.
- Handle any student problems escalated by parents and teachers.
- Oversee the contracting and/or delivery of special education services to ensure that the school is in compliance with state and federal laws.
- Oversee the implementation and coordination of state standardized testing process, and ensure high student participation rates.
- Provide the Governing Board with support including posting of Agendas, Governing Board communication and providing specialized reports or information as needed
- Provide assistance to families in need of additional support encourage a high level of participation.
- Participate in student interest efforts including in-state trips, presentations, Q & A sessions and responding to the press.
- Communicate with parent Community Coordinators to suggest social activities and relevant field trips for students.
- Devise and implement virtual methods of creating and maintaining a "school community".
- Recruit, supervise and evaluate all school staff as required by the state.
- All other duties as assigned.

Requirements

- New Mexico Administrator License required, Level 3B
- Minimum of 5 years teaching experience and some administrative or management experience
- Bachelor's and Master's Degree from a regionally accredited college/university.
- Hold a Level 3A NM Teaching credential.

- Passage of the New Mexico Teacher Assessment and the Content Knowledge Assessment in Educational Administration.
- Excellent communication skills, both oral and written
- Customer focused approach
- Flexible
- Demonstrated ability to work well in fast paced environment
- Team player
- Technologically proficient (especially with Microsoft Office products)

The NMCA Governing Board has plans to partner with Connections via the Statement of Work Agreement to provide human resource services including recruitment to ensure the Charter School is staffed by well-trained and effective online learning professionals. It is anticipated that the recruiting of the principal will begin in early Spring 2013 as the principal needs to be hired prior to teacher and staff recruitment. The job search process will begin with a job posting, advertising for the position through multiple avenues, screening of candidates, and identifying the top candidates for NMCA Governing Board consideration. Ideally, NMCA Governing Board will select a candidate for the principal by April 1, 2013.

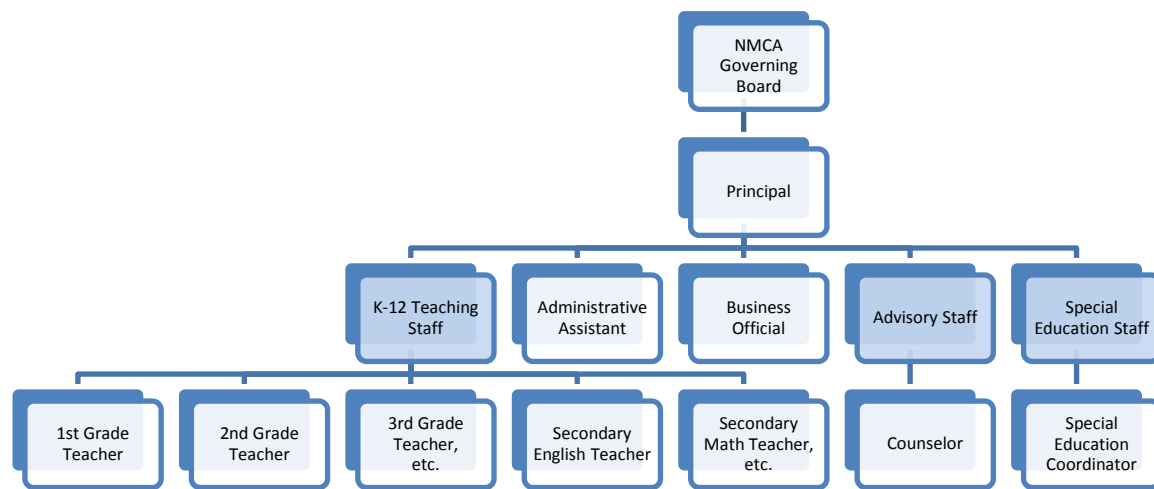
3. Describe how the governing body will convey to and delineate the roles and responsibilities of the school's head administrator and how will he/she be evaluated and held accountable for the operations for the school's success. Provide a proposed job description for the head administrator including responsibilities that are significant and unique to charter school leaders. Attach the job description as Appendix C.

During the hiring process, the Governing Board and the principal will review the job descriptions of both the Governing Board and the Principal to ensure both are clear about expectations and delineation of roles. Daily management of the school will be the Principal's responsibility while overall governance and other duties as outlined in Section IIIA are the responsibility of the Governing Board. The Governing Board will annually evaluate the Principal based upon performance. Annual performance will be based upon meeting school goals, staff evaluations, and input from Connections based upon their experience interacting with the Principal and operating other successful virtual school programs nationwide. The Governing Board shall adopt pay scales, performance criteria, a performance appraisal system, and discharging policies for all employees, including the Principal. Explanation of such policies will be integrated into the Employee Manual adopted by the Governing Board.

D. Organizational Structure of the School

1. Describe the organizational structure of the school and provide an organization chart that clearly delineates the relationships between all parties including the administering of the day-to-day activities of the school.

The operating structure of NMCA will be similar to a traditional educational environment, with a Principal, hired and approved by the Governing Board, who will supervise administrative staff and teachers who implement the curriculum according to the policies and procedures approved by the Governing Board. The Principal will be responsible for implementing Governing Board policies in the day-to-day operation of the school and will act in an information and advisory capacity to the Governing Board. The need for new policies may be suggested by parents, the school staff, or others, but development of those policies will be the responsibility of the Governing Board with advice from its independent board counsel. Below is the planned organizational chart for NMCA:



2. Include proposed job descriptions of certified and licensed staff. In addition, if your organization structure included non-traditional roles or positions, explain why these roles are important in implementing the school’s mission and educational program. Attach staff job descriptions as Appendix D.

Please see detailed job descriptions in Appendix D. Online learning requires an additional skill set and professional development. A focus on individualizing education for students and a high level of comfort with technology will be included in screening candidates for positions. The positions include Elementary Teachers, Secondary Teachers, Manager of School Counseling, Manager of Special Education, a Certified Business Official, Advisory Teachers, and Adjunct Teachers.

Both the Advisory Teachers and the Adjunct Teachers are unique in an online environment but are crucial to the success of the student and the school. The Advisory Teacher role is supportive to the student’s regular teacher but also works closely with the Manager of School Counseling. Much like a special education teacher is supportive of the regular classroom teacher to ensure individual student success, an advisory teacher will work in a similar capacity. The Advisory Teacher oversees and maintains the personalized learning plan for each student enrolled in the program and to which they are assigned and works closely to ensure that these plans are fulfilled. They also are a critical component of ensuring student success both academically and personally and implement programs for students and families related to interpersonal adjustment issues. The Advisory teacher also will coordinate a team of middle and high school teachers to help identify students who are “at risk” or “in crisis” and act as the main point of contact for these students and families, communicating regularly with them (See Appendix D job description for more information).

The Adjunct Teacher position is a critical position that increases educational options, course selections, and access to highly qualified, content-area specific teachers for students. For example, it may be difficult to justify a full time AP Chemistry teacher position due to student enrollment and demand especially in the first few years of the school but hiring an adjunct teacher who is highly qualified in the subject matter and an exceptional teacher is a great opportunity for students.

All employees must comply with all state laws requiring fingerprinting and other documentation.

3. Provide a description of comprehensive evaluation process for educational staff, and how it will be tied to student performance and the school's mission and goals.

Faculty and Staff Assessment: Members of the NMCA Founding Board visited the Colorado Connections Academy school and were impressed by the quality of teachers and administrators. The Founding Board is interested in working with Connections on developing effective faculty and staff assessment practices to build on the national experience of Connections in the area of online education. Connections uses a Performance Evaluation System to create a high performance school by encouraging employees to put forth their best effort, focusing all employees on the school's main goals, rewarding and retaining employees based on outcomes/results, and providing continuous feedback for employee development. The Performance Evaluation System is integrated with Connexus® and provides detailed data in designing goals and determining performance metrics in relationship to student performance. The NMCA Founding Board will review the Performance Evaluation System, make modifications, and approve for use at NMCA.

Sample Assessment System: A formal mid-year review will be completed in December or January, and a formal end-of-year review in May or June. Periodic feedback will be given both formally and informally throughout the school year. All educators and school administration will be evaluated based on a combination of competencies and goals. The competencies are professional competencies aligning with the core standards for teaching, and may vary by type of teaching position (e.g. Special Education), or administrative position (e.g. Principal). The goals will be based on student and school achievement in alignment with the Performance Framework/Charter Goals. Competencies and goals are reviewed with staff at the beginning of the school year, and are available for viewing and comment throughout the school year.

Competencies are evaluated in the context of the school's goals, which evaluate student growth and achievement metrics, and observations of an employee's proficiency within each competency are evaluated using various methods, including parent and student feedback, observations of lessons and interactions, and review of relevant documentation and data. Competencies are evaluated using the following scale, and include comments from the supervisor: Highly Effective, Effective, Needs Improvement, and Ineffective.

School administrators will be focused on specific competencies including leadership (school culture, leadership development, vision, decision making); communication (staff, school community, others); data management (management of school budget, proficiency of software, using internal and external data effectively to drive results); time and personnel management; instructional leader (facilitates learning, promotes good teaching practices). The core teaching competencies include the following (additional competencies may be assigned based on position, responsibilities, and job level): ensure high quality instruction; personalize students' programs; monitor student performance and provide timely feedback and intervention; monitor student participation; communicate frequently; conduct and document all required contacts; and collaborate and develop professionally.

The goals are aligned with student achievement metrics included in Connexus and may include any of the following: self evaluation; student input; parent feedback; supervisor observations; statewide assessment results; school assessment results; student participation/completion. Goals are evaluated using the following scale, and include comments from the supervisor: exceeded goal; met goal; partially met goal; did not meet goal. Employees receive an Overall Individual Rating on the end-of-year review based on evaluation of the competencies and goals. The rating levels are Highly Effective, Effective, Needs Improvement, or Ineffective. All compensation after an employee's initial salary offer is based on performance (see below).

The outcome of an individual's evaluation will affect future decisions regarding staff retention, promotional opportunities, or disciplinary action and termination decisions. An employee with at least one area needing improvement will be placed on an individualized Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) and given opportunities for professional development, specifically in the areas requiring improvement.

Salary Administration and Benefits: A salary range will be determined based on research of market compensation and financial considerations at the time of posting. Initial employment offers will be based on

specific criteria, including years of experience, education, and other relevant skills/qualifications. After the initial hire, compensation increases and incentives are based on performance. See budget for estimated salaries by position and Appendix L for a proposed salary schedule. Teachers may receive an annual salary increase based on performance ratings. With NMCA Governing Board approval, teachers can apply for the following career ladder opportunities and assume additional responsibilities in order to earn additional compensation as follows:

- Coordinator Teacher – base plus 4%
- Lead Teacher – base plus 9%
- Master Teacher – base plus 15%

A teacher will be given the opportunity through contracts to earn merit-based or performance-based pay increases. Both salary increases and performance pay considerations are contingent on the fiscal performance of the school. All faculty and administrative evaluations will be aligned to any required NM teacher and administrative evaluation systems. The NMCA Governing Board is supportive of the state's efforts in examining teacher and administrator evaluations.

Non-teaching positions: A salary range will be determined based on research of market compensation and financial considerations. Initial employment offers will be based on specific criteria, including years of experience, education, and other relevant skills/qualifications. After the initial hire, compensation increases and merit pay are based on performance. See budget and Appendix L for estimated salaries by position. With NMCA Governing Board approval, school administrative employees may earn additional compensation based on performance measures determined at the beginning of each school year or as outlined in their contracts, if applicable. Performance measures will be defined by school performance and other indicators of an individual's overall job performance as defined by the administrator.

Teacher and administrator evaluation: To ensure the highest quality teaching, NMCA will set as its goal that the majority of the teacher ratings will be above average, such as a 3 or better on a 4-point scale, using an evaluation rubric administered by the school principal – along with feedback solicited from families. The NMCA instructional staff will be observed on a regular basis and evaluated using a comprehensive, multi-layered evaluation system integrated within Connexus. The teacher evaluation system may include the following and will be aligned to NM teacher evaluation systems:

1. Parent surveys, which may rate such things as the responsiveness, effectiveness, knowledge, and skills of their assigned teacher(s);
2. Principal evaluations from observations of Learning Coach/student interaction, including LiveLesson sessions, and review of correspondence;
3. Peer reviews evaluating the degree of cooperation, support and sharing of knowledge
4. Aggregate performance of enrolled students based on a value-added improvement model and documents by data from Connexus;
5. An annual performance plan created by each teacher incorporating strategies to achieve, measureable school goals.

The school principal evaluation system may include the following and will be aligned to NM administrator evaluation systems:

- Parent surveys, rating the responsiveness, effectiveness, and instructional expertise of the school as a whole;
- Aggregate performance of enrolled students based on a value-added improvement model as documented through data captured by Connexus;
- An annual performance plan created by the principal detailing his/her strategies to achieve measurable school goals.

The school principal will be evaluated by the NMCA Governing Board with data and may be assisted by consultative functions provided by Connections. The effectiveness of the principal in all areas related to the day-to-day operations of the school, as well as areas related to overall school performance will be evaluated.

4. Provide a staffing plan that demonstrates a sound understanding of staffing needs and that is viable and adequate for effectively implementing the educational program/curriculum.

The budget reflects a staffing plan and ratio that is 43:1 in Year 1 and gradually declines to 26:1 in Year 5. Online learning allows for a flexible staffing plan that can grow, retract, or expand with the enrollment of the school and not limited by facility space. Class size, staffing patterns, individual class load, and teaching load waivers will be requested to allow for the flexibility in staffing. Because classroom management, lesson plan development, and scheduling issues are minimized in an online classroom, slightly higher class ratios than a face-to-face classroom is warranted. Please note that the staffing plan is slightly modified from the approved Facility Plan submitted in April due to knowledge gained in the charter trainings over the last several months.

A full time certified business official is included in the staffing chart below. A half time special education manager/teacher is included in Year 1 who will provide all services. Special education teachers are allocated in Year 2 based upon anticipated enrollments in special education.

Description	13-14	14-15	15-16	16-17	17-18
# of students					
Kindergarten	20	28	40	56	80
1-5 Grades	135	190	271	378	540
6-12 Grades	345	482	689	966	1380
TOTAL # students	500	700	1000	1400	2000
Teachers (K)	1	1	2	2.5	4
Teachers (1-5)	3	6	8	12.5	20
Teachers (6-12)	6	9	17.5	28	46
Advisory Teachers	1.5	3	4	4	6
Special Ed	0	2	3	4	4
TOTAL # Teachers	11.5	21	34.5	51	80
Mgr Special Ed	.5	1	1	1	1
Mgr Counseling	.5	1	1	1	1
TOTAL # Support	1	2	2	2	2
Principal	1	1	1	1	1
Asst. Principal	0	1	2	3	3
Admin Asst.	1	2	3	3	4
TOTAL # Admin	2	4	6	7	8
Business Official	.5	.5	1	1	1
TOTAL # Central	.5	.5	1	1	1

The NMCA Governing Board anticipates contracting with Connections for purposes of recruiting its administrator and to assist the administrator in recruitment of the staff. Connections has extensive experience in recruiting, screening, and qualifying staff for high-quality virtual schools. Strategies to attract highly qualified staff will be implemented to include posting on Connections national website, Career Builder, NewMexico.Jobing.com, and NewMexicoJobs.com. Job fairs will be attended throughout the state. Even though the NMCA Governing Board has plans to retain Connections for staff recruitment, the NMCA and school administrator will be responsible for approving, hiring, and managing the school.

5. State the length of the school day and school year (including a total number of days/hours of instruction). Describe in detail how this schedule supports the school's educational program and how the calendar is optimal for achieving high outcomes for your target student population.

School Day, School Calendar and Instructional Minutes: NMCA will follow a traditional school year calendar that will meet or exceed the requirements of NMSA 22-2-8.1 (2009):

1. kindergarten, two and one-half hours per day or 450 hours per year or five and one-half hours for for half-day programs or nine hundred ninety hours per year for full day programs;
2. grades one through six, five and one-half hours per day or nine hundred ninety hours per year; and
3. grades seven through twelve, six hours per day or one thousand eighty hours per year.

The Governing Board will approve the school calendar annually. The school calendar may be extended to allow families more flexibility in completing the year's work, or to provide extra learning time for students who are at risk (generally not by more than two weeks). The Connections curriculum is notably rigorous, and the time commitment it requires of students is comparable to that of a traditional school day. Since NMCA learners will not face the distractions and interruptions of a typical school setting – from lining up in the hallway to waiting out the teacher's handling of disruptive peers – they often use their learning time much more efficiently. The in-depth application of concepts that is often relegated to homework in a conventional school setting will be an integral part of the learning day at NMCA; the application of discrete skills, extended projects, and remedial and enrichment activities will be part of the daily routine for students and their Learning Coaches. The NMCA program will provide for and offer more than the legally mandated minimum instructional minutes for every grade. The flexibility in conjunction with high accountability supports the mission of NMCA to help each student who needs an alternative to the traditional classroom maximize his or her potential and meet the highest performance standards through a uniquely individualized learning program, access to high quality NM-certified teachers, and high parental involvement.

The school day is not limited to certain hours for start and end times; however, the school's teaching staff will be available during the school's hours of operation, typically 8am-4pm. NMCA teachers will work primarily from the teaching center as described in the facilities section, Appendix I. Teachers collaborate to share ideas, information, and teaching techniques with the families who are always welcome to visit. NMCA will operate according to a Governing Board approved school calendar, which includes days when teachers will not be available due to professional development (all other Support Services are available during these days), and days when the school is completely closed (no Support Services are available during these days). Student learning may continue during any days when the school is closed as student's still have access to their online course, learning content, and personalized learning plan. The following represents an example of how a school day may vary based upon student needs and schedule. Please note how learning is integrated within individual activities as well as the Live Lessons and phone calls with teachers. Learning can occur when students learn best – not just between 9 a.m. and 3 p.m.



6. Describe your professional development plan that supports the successful implementation of the educational plan, mission, and goals and that meets state requirements.

In addition to the values described at the beginning of this section, the teachers at NMCA will benefit from ongoing and effective professional growth. Beginning with an initial teacher orientation course and several days of face-to-face pre-service training, with an interactive program manual as a resource to teacher training course segments and specific Connections professional development courses, teachers build a strong foundation for teaching in this environment with student success as a focus. Graduate courses in online learning, professional learning communities and weekly teacher updates keeps teachers up to date and on the road to being experts in virtual learning.

At NMCA, teacher professional development is considered critically important in ensuring that the staff is optimally effective in teaching in a virtual environment and addressing the New Mexico Standards and Common Core State Standards in their daily instructional practice. NMCA will use the *National Standards for Quality Online Teaching* published by the International Association for K-12 Online Learning (iNACOL),²⁶ as well as Connections Core Teaching Standards (See Appendix O), as guides for pinpointing necessary teacher skills and professional development requirements.

NMCA has plans to engage Connections to provide the professional development for teachers as the professional development is integrated and aligned with the student curriculum, student pedagogy, student information system, data, evaluation systems, and other services (See Appendix H for Statement of Work Agreement). NMCA will provide its teachers with a comprehensive teacher training and professional development program to equip them with the following:

- A working knowledge of the NMCA curriculum and New Mexico State Standards and Common Core State Standards;
- Strategies and best practices for virtual learning and instruction;
- How to utilize and navigate the tools of Connexus;
- How to develop Personalized Learning Plans (PLP);
- Forms of assessment and how to utilize test results to guide instruction and monitor student progress;
- Knowledge of program processes and policies;
- How to foster a virtual school community.

Specifically, NMCA teachers will participate in the following professional development activities designed to hone their understanding of the curriculum and accountability measures:

- **Initial Teacher Orientation Course:** All teachers (and the Principal) will complete a self-guided teacher-training course developed specifically for NMCA. This course will be delivered through Connexus, and contains actual lessons, assessments, and links to online tutorials. The focus of this course is to prepare teachers for teaching in a Connections school, and it covers “the basics” including curriculum, assessment, personalizing instruction, school year events, grading and report cards, communication, and essential Connexus tools. Upon successful completion of this course and assessments, teachers are ready to begin instruction. Teachers are expected to earn a grade of 80% or better.
- **The NMCA Interactive Program Manual:** The NMCA Program Manual is a resource for teachers and school-based personnel to use all year. It contains policies, procedures, and “how to” components that aid the teachers on a day-to-day basis. These “how to” components also have accompanying on-line tutorial segments that visually demonstrate each process.
- **Pre-Service Face-to-Face Training:** In addition to the self-guided course, NMCA staff will engage in several days of face-to-face training and orientation on site. The focus of this training will be best practices in an online environment, advanced orientation to the curriculum and Connexus beyond what is included in the self-guided course, and substantial training on working effectively with students, Learning Coaches, and parents.

²⁶ National Standards for Quality Online Teaching, iNACOL, [www.inacol.org](http://www.inacol.org/resources/nationalstandards/NACOL%20Standards%20Quality%20Online%20Teaching.pdf), <http://www.inacol.org/resources/nationalstandards/NACOL%20Standards%20Quality%20Online%20Teaching.pdf>

- ***Supplemental Teacher Training Course Segments:*** Once school is up and running, NMCA will present more segments of the training course to teachers on an ongoing basis. These segments contain information about more complex features and functions of Connexus, instructional strategies, and processes that teachers need to implement once school is successfully under way. There is also a differentiated course designed specifically for returning staff members that targets new concepts, advanced applications, and serves as a refresher on basic skills.
- ***Connections Professional Development Sessions:*** Connections provides teachers with ongoing professional development activities throughout the year. Presenters with various backgrounds and areas of content expertise conduct live tutorial sessions on a rotating basis throughout the school year. Teachers are required to attend monthly sessions virtually throughout the year including such topics as: implementing specific instructional strategies, current curriculum-specific topics and trends, effective teaching strategies and communication skills for a virtual environment, utilizing the state standards to guide instruction, educational technology, using data to guide instruction, educational trends, and so on.
- ***Connections Graduate Course in Online Learning:*** Connections has collaborated with Boise State University to create a series of graduate level courses in teaching in an online environment. NMCA teachers will be encouraged to take these courses as well as to pursue additional relevant post-graduate coursework.
- ***Professional Learning Community:*** In addition to school based professional learning communities, each Connections teacher has access to a robust online Professional Learning Community portal in Connexus, which lists multiple professional development opportunities as well as message boards, recorded LiveLessons, shared resources, and more. Teachers describe this area as “a community created and dedicated to shared values and vision, working and learning collaboratively, shared decision making, collective creativity, and supportive and shared leadership. As a collegial group, we are united in our commitment to student learning through collaboration in our community.”
- ***Weekly Teacher Updates:*** The Connections School Support Staff compiles and sends out to all teachers a weekly electronic newsletter that highlights improvements to the curriculum and Connexus, new procedures, shared tips, and community building activities.
- ***NMPED:*** NMCA staff will attend required and relevant training offered by the NMPED for training on topics specifically relevant to issues that affect New Mexico public education and school operations.

In terms of teachers’ typical schedule and opportunities for collaboration, the virtual school setting allows teachers maximum flexibility every day to engage in collegial support. This is heightened at NMCA, where teachers will most often work together physically in the teaching center, facilitating unprecedented collaboration.

NMCA teachers will be surveyed regularly regarding their satisfaction with professional development experiences to help guide continuous improvement in this area. In addition, specific teacher accountability metrics help school administrators quantify impact of professional development activities and areas in need of additional work. The Connections curriculum, instruction, and school support areas also conduct ongoing evaluations of teacher training and professional development activities.

E. Employees

- 1. Provide an explanation of the relationship that will exist between the charter school and its employees. This explanation should include a general description of the terms and conditions of employment for each class of employee (administration, professional staff and administrative staff) and how the school will address employees’ recognized representatives.**

The school will recruit staff through a variety of channels, including traditional methods for posting job opportunities, plus networking with educational organizations; outreach via enrolled families; and special outreach to teachers and administrators who are seeking an alternative environment.

NMCA will strive to offer a work environment that provides opportunities for each employee to maximize his or her potential and meet the highest performance standards. Incorporated in this mission are core values as an organization, which include:

- We value creativity in all aspects. We expect and support employees to be creative with their ideas, their work environment, and their approach to their jobs.
- We value the health and comfort of our employees.
- We will recognize and reward exceptional performance.
- We will be available to answer questions or take suggestions from any employee.
- We appreciate employees' ideas. We firmly believe the person doing a job is in the best position to think of ways of doing it more easily, efficiently, and effectively.
- We value and support education and expect everyone to undertake life-long learning.
- We expect everyone to work very hard, but we value family above all else. We will always work to make sure that we provide the flexibility and support in our work environment so that our employees can attend to family emergencies and school conferences.

The school leader and NMCA Governing Board will follow the provisions of the School Personnel Act [22-10A-1 NMSA 1978]. Upon approval of the charter, the head administrator of the charter school, with NMCA Governing Board approval, shall employ, fix the salaries of, assign, terminate and discharge all employees of the charter school.

2. Provide proposed governing body personnel policies that comply with all applicable federal and state procedures and regulations (attach as Appendix E) or state how and when employment policies and procedures will be developed and how you will ensure that they comply with applicable federal and state labor laws, regulations and rules.

Upon approval of the charter, the attached sample governing body personnel policies (Appendix E) will be updated to reflect New Mexico specific requirements, reviewed by legal counsel to ensure they comply with applicable federal and state labor laws, regulations and rules and will be approved by the NMCA Governing Board. The attached sample governing body personnel policies document contains general employment policies and procedures and all policies contained within and are subject to change.

3. Describe a staff discipline process that provides for due process in accordance with state law.

Employees are expected to meet certain standards of work performance and conduct. These include, but are not limited to, those outlined in the employee handbook as well as in the employee's job description. Employees who do not meet the standards and expectations may be given the opportunity to improve performance and/or conduct through the disciplinary process. The nature of the discipline used, up to and including immediate termination of employment will depend upon the conduct of the employee and the relevant circumstances. It is not a guarantee of continued employment when an employee is placed on an improvement plan as part of the disciplinary process. Employees are expected to meet their performance expectations daily.

If efforts to assist staff to improve are unsuccessful, NMCA will follow the requirements in the New Mexico School Personnel Act that afford contract and tenured employees the opportunity to be heard by the Governing Board and to appeal termination and discharge.

4. Outline a proposed process for addressing employee grievances.

The NMCA Governing Board will encourage open and direct lines of communication between employees at all levels of the organization. The Governing Board respects the intelligence of its employees and their ability to speak for themselves. It benefits everyone when employees feel free to bring questions, suggestions and concerns directly to their managers. Examples of issues that should be handled through this resolution process include: concerns about the application of school policies and procedures within the school to school staff, parents and students; concerns about personnel decisions directly involving an individual or decisions affecting other individuals at the school; work conditions; questions about the competence and overall fitness of a colleague or a supervisor; and regulatory compliance.

A proposed resolution process is detailed below.

STEPS IN THE PROCESS

1. If the issue does not involve a violation of school policy or an ethical or regulatory requirement, meet with at least two levels of administration. An employee must, in good faith, make every attempt to resolve the issue with his or her immediate supervisor and, if that is not successful, then with his or her next level supervisor, which will generally be the principal. Fear of retaliation, which is prohibited, is not a legitimate reason to skip this step. If the issue does involve a violation of school policy or an ethical or regulatory requirement, then the employee should proceed directly to step 2.

2. Put the Issue in Writing. If the immediate supervisor or the next level supervisor cannot resolve the issue, or if the issue involves a violation of school policy or an ethical or regulatory requirement, put the issue in writing. It is important to describe the issue, the desired result, and your proposed solution to the issue. This step should occur as soon as possible and in no event more than twenty (20) business days after the occurrence of the problem.

3. If the issue relates to a personnel matter or work condition, contact Human Resources. After an employee fully describes the issue in writing, Human Resources will help them and their supervisor consider how policies, procedures, and practices relate for the issue. Often, the policies in the employee handbook will dictate a resolution to the issue. If the issue involves a school policy or an ethical or regulatory requirement, contact a member of the school administration. Human Resources can provide you with the name of the appropriate contact or you can ask them to contact the appropriate individual on your behalf.

4. If your issue is not resolved by either Human Resources or School Services, you can request that your matter be presented to your school's governing body (if applicable) for final consideration or you can contact them directly. The contact information for your school's governing body is located on the school's web site.

F. Community/Parent/Employee Involvement in Governance

1. Explain the nature and extent of parental, professional educator, and community involvement in the governance and the operation of the school and how their involvement will help to advance the school's mission and vision

Parents, family, and community involvement are absolutely central to the NMCA model. There are many benefits to parent involvement in education. Parent participation in a child's education can lead to:

- Improved grades and test scores
- Higher graduation rates
- Greater enrollment in post secondary education

Parents are crucial to the planning process of the school, as well as its operation. Interested parents have already played an important role in encouraging the formation of the school, and will remain involved leading to the school's opening. Parental feedback is also an important hallmark of the school's outreach and information sessions in the community. The school will take full advantage of this valuable communication with families to ensure that the school reflects their unique needs and creative ideas. Parents are often the "Learning Coach" at NMCA, although an extended family member or other caring adult can also serve in that role. The Learning Coach will work in person with each NMCA student under the guidance of the New Mexico-licensed professional teacher. At the high school level, the Learning Coach will be less involved with daily instruction but serves an important supervisory role for the student. In addition to involvement focused on their own children's learning needs, NMCA parents will have multiple opportunities to shape the overall school experience. Specifically, parents are encouraged to participate in the school in the following ways:

- **Parent representation on the Governing Board:** The draft bylaws provide for a minimum of one position to be held by a community leader, an educator, and a parent. The parent position could be a parent or guardian of a student currently enrolled, formerly enrolled, or an intent to enroll. These parent members benefit from intensive Governing Board training geared toward making them optimally

effective representatives of parent interests. Parent Governing Board members are encouraged to seek officer positions on the Governing Board and may be appointed to provide close review/feedback on key documents such as the School Handbook, Parent/Learning Coach Agreements, and other materials for parents before full Governing Board action.

- **Governing Board Committees:** The Governing Board will appoint a parent representative to serve on the Audit Committee.
- **Ad hoc Board Committees:** Parents may serve on ad hoc groups convened by the Governing Board to focus on particular issues such as community partnerships or neighborhood outreach.
- **Community Coordinators:** The volunteer parent Community Coordinators play a critical role in the school by developing a vibrant and active school community to serve the needs of families distributed across a wide geographic region. In addition to facilitating family get-togethers and formal field trips, the Community Coordinators provide an important communication link between families and the school, ensuring through phone conferences and news updates that school staff are attuned to parent community needs and vice versa. NMCA Community Coordinators and staff will reach out to community-based organizations and businesses to coordinate face-to-face community service and field trip opportunities for students. In addition, the school Counselor will work with post-secondary institutions to arrange college explorations for NMCA students. The school will draw upon the deep and diverse community connections represented on the Governing Board – whose members represent business and education entities across the state and beyond – to ensure that NMCA School students have multiple opportunities to benefit.
- **Providers of ongoing, actionable feedback:** On a daily basis, NMCA parents are encouraged to express their opinions about school matters large and small. Through the five-star StarTrack lesson rating system (described below), they can rate and comment upon every lesson in the curriculum; they can also rate their entire school experience through StarTrack every time they log on. Principals often conduct informal surveys and calls for feedback via WebMail. In addition, NMCA parents participate in a formal annual satisfaction to help identify what the school is doing well and how the school can improve. Parents evaluate the school on a number of criteria including student progress, teacher support, and quality of the curriculum. School staff and Connections school administration use the results of this Parent Satisfaction Survey to measure school performance against annual goals as well as overall company performance, with specific action steps planned for the following year to improve satisfaction in targeted areas.

Soliciting and Incorporating Stakeholder Feedback: Connections actively solicits documented feedback from all stakeholders, but particularly from students, parents, and teachers. The following are some of the key channels for collecting this valuable input:

- **StarTrack™ Rating System:** This system will be used at NMCA and will allow students, parents, and teachers to evaluate each lesson as they engage in it. This feedback will be sent for analysis and follow-up and is designed to continually improve the content, form, delivery methods, and overall effectiveness of the curriculum. Parents can also rate their overall school experience using a StarTrack system similar to the one used to rate individual lessons. Since the StarTrack tool was launched in Fall 2007, parents and students enrolled with a Connections affiliated school have provided more than one million lesson ratings. Average rating of lessons on a five point scale in 2011-12 was 4.19.
- **Teacher Course Liaisons:** These teachers, who are experts in their curricular areas, gather feedback from other teachers across all Connections affiliated schools, and work with the Connections curriculum department to make updates and revisions to the curriculum based on this teacher input.
- **Annual Satisfaction Surveys:** Connections uses a third-party survey firm to conduct annual parent, student, and staff satisfaction surveys. The results of these surveys are used to drive improvements to the curriculum, instruction, and program.
- **Meetings:** A variety of formal and informal meetings within each school, and multi-school meetings such as the weekly Principals' meeting, principal school improvement planning meetings, school based professional learning communities, Teacher Talk Tuesdays (T³), provide additional channels for feedback, collaboration, and communication among colleagues and professional educators, and

opportunities for continual school improvement to not only the curriculum but the delivery model as well.

- **Teacher and administrator evaluation:** To ensure the highest quality teaching, NMCA will set as its goal that the majority of the teacher ratings will be above average, such as a 3 or better on a 4-point scale, using an evaluation rubric administered by the school principal – along with feedback solicited from families. The NMCA instructional staff will be observed on a regular basis and evaluated using a comprehensive, multi-layered evaluation system including parent and student feedback.

Community, parent, family, and professional educators are key components of supporting the mission of NMCA. Through formal and informal channels from field trips to surveys, all stakeholders have an avenue to provide feedback and input. This ensures that the school is on a cycle of continuous school improvement and all stakeholders are valued.

2. How will you address complaints from the community, parent, or students about the school? Describe a clear resolution process for complaints.

The school is committed to ensuring community, parent, and student satisfaction, and takes its responsibilities for the provision of educational services to students very seriously. These school responsibilities will be set out in the Parent/Legal Guardian Agreement (PLCA) and the School Handbook and include such things as: contacting the family regularly, delivering educational materials and equipment, and providing accessible support.

The school will also ensure the family and student adhere to their responsibilities as stated in the PLCA and the School Handbook, and when necessary, will discipline a student for, violation of a school policy.

If a parent has concerns, he/she may institute the following proposed Grievance Process or one that affords appropriate levels of due process to adopted by the Governing Board once the charter is approved:

Grievance Process

1. A parent with the grievance must, in writing, report the dissatisfaction, and submit it to the student's teacher (or other appropriate NMCA staff member, as necessary). All parties involved must be appropriately defined, and the problem must be clearly outlined.
2. The recipient of the grievance (generally the teacher) must review the issue with his or her supervisor (generally the principal) and respond to the parent within three (3) school days.
3. If the original recipient did not resolve the grievance, the parent should request a meeting with the recipient's supervisor. The supervisor should investigate the matter, and schedule a meeting with the parent, the student, if necessary, and any other staff member (if necessary), within five (5) school days.
4. If either party does not resolve this grievance, the parent should then request a meeting with the school administration. School administration will investigate the matter, and schedule a meeting within five (5) school days.
5. If a resolution was not reached at the above three (3) meetings, the parent may request a meeting with the parent member on the NM Governing Board, who will investigate the matter, and arrange a meeting within five (5) school days. Current contact information for Governing Board members will be listed on the school webpage.

G. Student Policies

1. **Attach as Appendix F a proposed student discipline policy that complies with the Student Rights and Responsibilities set forth in the Public Education Department rules and regulations at 6.11.2 (NMAC).**

See Appendix F for a draft student discipline policy.

Virtual Learning Policies: There are specific policies that are unique and/or very important in a fully online school where technology is used to promote students' learning. NMCA provides a safe and orderly environment by keeping students safe from online predators and solicitors. An Internet Safety Course for students, parents, and Learning Coaches will be provided by Connections, which contains valuable information about practicing safe behaviors online. This course is also required training for all school staff. NMCA will implement the

numerous protective safeguards developed by Connections to prevent harmful viruses from entering students' computer systems. In addition, the NMCA instructors will provide a safe environment for their students to ask questions without the fear of hurtful behavior from other students in the online class. The personal relationships that each teacher develops with his/her students ensure a safe learning environment for all. All Connections - provided computers are equipped with heightened Internet security settings and Internet filtering software that can be activated upon request. If using their own computer, Connections' Technical Support will help students and parents configure Internet security settings and find additional Internet filtering software. Appropriate conduct is expected of all students at NMCA. NMCA follows formal due process procedures to deal with the discipline of students (Appendix F). NMCA strictly prohibits any form of bullying/cyber bullying, harassment, hazing, or other destructive actions that may cause emotional and/or physical harm to students. School policies regarding these prohibited behaviors are documented in Appendix F. Staff trainings regarding student safety are a critical part of the Connections professional development plan. The Connections course, *Students in Distress: Recognizing and Responding*, will be required for all staff and designed to help teachers and other school staff become familiar with the signs of distress such as bullying/cyber bullying, neglect and abuse, depression or other issues that would keep them from doing their best and to know how to respond promptly and professionally.

2. Describe how you will provide alternative educational settings for eligible students who are long-term suspended or expelled.

Virtual schools provide a unique opportunity to allow students with behavior issues to be successful. Physical classroom distractions that could cause issues in a face-to-face classroom do not exist in a virtual classroom. Students can concentrate on learning without classroom management distracting from learning time. Suspensions and expulsions are rare in the virtual classroom.

When a student is suspended, he or she is temporarily removed from class (Connexus) or a school sponsored program or activity. The length of a suspension is determined by the principal (up to 10 days at a time except for students with an IEP). A suspension will be documented in writing and will become part of a student's permanent record. During a period of suspension as defined by the school principal, a student's permission to log on to and/or use parts of Connexus is restricted. Student access to WebMail, the message boards, online clubs/activities, and/or all of Connexus may be revoked. In such cases where the student's access is completely revoked, the Learning Coach is responsible for logging on to Connexus and obtaining the student's assignments, responding to WebMail, and recording assessment responses for the student. The student should continue with his or her schoolwork during a suspension.

When a student is expelled, he or she is separated from the school for an extended period of time, or permanently, for disciplinary reasons. An expulsion will be documented in writing and will become part of a student's permanent record. The school will prohibit both strip search and corporal punishment of a student. If a student is expelled, the school administration may assist with finding an alternative school option for the student as outlined in Students Rights and Responsibilities in 6.11.2 NMCA

H. Student Recruitment and Enrollment

1. Explain the plan and specific strategies for student recruitment and marketing to attract students from the school's targeted population and that will provide for broad circulation of information about the new school. Include a proposed timeline for recruitment and enrollment.

The NMCA Governing Board is aware of HB2 and the language prohibiting marketing activities by districts and charter schools. As clarification is reached over the coming year regarding the conflict between HB 2 and 6.80.4.12 D(2), the NMCA Governing Board will adhere to the law and guidance from the PED on the issue of recruitment. Student recruitment and enrollment policies need to be balanced with the mutual goals of ensuring that families are aware of the choice opportunity with the competing demand of being fiscally conservative. The following represents a proposed plan for recruitment and enrollment if allowable by law:

NMCA has an active base of interested families that have already reached out, without any direct outreach, to the Connections website seeking additional information about the school. Upon approval of the charter, NMCA

will actively recruit families that represent the full cultural, demographic and socioeconomic range of New Mexico. To do so, NMCA will use a variety of means to inform families about its services and provide them an opportunity to enroll, including:

- **Direct mail:** NMCA will conduct direct mail campaigns announcing the charter school to families with children throughout the state of New Mexico. In a typical mailing, a postcard will be sent out inviting parents to attend an Information Session (see below), visit the website, and/or contact the call center. NMCA may also use electronic mail to supplement or replace its physical mail campaign. Mail will be sent to people who request information, as well as other prospects who have school-aged children and an interest in learning at home.
- **Information sessions:** NMCA will conduct multiple Information Sessions for families across the state of New Mexico to assure that families from a variety of communities are able to attend with a particular focus on rural communities. Some of these information sessions may be virtual, meaning that families may attend the session from home via their computers. NMCA will use these sessions to educate families about the school and provide a complete array of information, including its curriculum, teaching methods, technology resources and testing requirements.
- **Web site:** Connections will create and maintain a website with a special link to NMCA. The website will contain information about the charter school, its Personalized Performance Learning approach, and its curriculum. The site will also contain a regularly updated set of Frequently Asked Questions and their answers. The site will also include enrollment information and procedures, information sessions schedules, and other useful tools for prospective students and their families.
- **Telephone/e-mail information service:** NMCA will launch and maintain a toll-free information line and an email information service to answer parents' questions about the charter school.
- **Community and youth services partnerships:** As part of its outreach process NMCA will provide information about the charter school to the community that may include: youth-serving organizations such as Boys and Girls Clubs, parent groups, health-related organizations, and organizations for young actors, dancers, and athletes.
- **Media outreach:** NMCA will make use of paid media, primarily advertisements in local newspapers and radio service announcements.
- **Referrals/word of mouth:** As NMCA grows, it anticipates that an increasing number of families who come to the school will enroll because of positive feedback received from their friends, community members, traditional school leaders and family. In similar schools nationally, 95% of parents say they would recommend their school to friends, neighbors and relatives.
- **Search Engines and Social Media:** NMCA will be linked to leading Internet search engines with local reference capability to help New Mexico families looking for a virtual school option to find this high-quality charter school. In addition, NMCA benefits from Facebook, Twitter, and other social media outreach conducted by parent advocates.

2. Describe the lottery process to be used by the school to allocate seats including tentative timeframes and procedures for conducting the lottery and for maintaining and using a wait list.

As a virtual charter school, NMCA is not subject to the same facility space restrictions that a brick-and-mortar charter school might face in accommodating as many students as may wish to attend. NMCA should be able to enroll students on a "first-come, first-served basis" as allowable by statute (22-8B-4.1) until the cap of 2000 is reached. Should the number of applicants exceed the enrollment levels during the initial enrollment period; the school will conduct a lottery that is in keeping with state and federal guidelines (Section 22-8B-4.1 and 6.80.4.12 NMAC).

If student demand requires NMCA to implement a lottery, the lottery will provide for a random selection process by which all applicants who have completed all enrollment tasks, including course placement, by a specified, publicly announced deadline are given an equal chance of being admitted to the charter school, with the exception that the school shall give enrollment preference to (1) students who were enrolled in the school in the prior year (once enrolled, students will not be required to reapply, but will need to provide notification that they intend to return to the school for the next grade; and (2) siblings of students presently enrolled in the

school. Should a lottery be necessary, a random selection process will be conducted to fill remaining openings in a school, grade, level or division. NMCA will notify students with preferences of their right to enroll. The selection process will be conducted no later than April 1st (after the first year opening, if needed). The selection will be conducted in public and will be designed to ensure that each student has an equal chance of being selected for enrollment. A disinterested party will perform the drawing of names or objects. Notice of at least one week will be given prior to the lottery. Student names and the order in which they were selected will be recorded. Any additional names will be placed on a wait list for that grade, level or division of the school. Eligible students on the wait list will be used to fill any openings. Once all the students on the wait list have been offered enrollment, NMCA will enroll students on a rolling basis.

Students will be enrolled on a first come/first served basis as all enrollment tasks including course placement are completed. After all space is full, students will be waitlisted and released to enroll based on availability in their grade and the date all enrollment tasks, including course placement, were completed. Connexus automatically assigns a waitlist time/date stamp to all students, so this is easily organized.

3. Describe the enrollment process including withdrawals, disenrollments, reenrollments, and transfers that comply with NMSA 1978 Section 22-8B-4.1, and Subsection D of 6.80.4.12 NMAC.

NMCA will be open to all eligible students statewide and shall not discriminate in its admission policies or practices. NMCA will actively work to ensure a statewide racial and ethnic balances in the school; however, in such a manner to ensure nondiscriminatory preference or practices. Partnerships and outreach efforts using a variety of community and youth organizations may aid in this process. Through extensive community outreach and full disclosure about the school's program, NMCA will attract those students and families who are most committed to student success in a virtual school setting. Lottery selection allows for fair and equitable selection of students in the event that more students apply than can be accommodated. Sibling preference in the lottery process will help committed families handle the logistics of successful participation in the virtual school.

In addition, NMCA will develop administrative procedures to ensure that the school's outreach, recruitment, and enrollment procedures do not discriminate against students based on physical, mental, emotional, or learning disability or handicap. As part of that process, NMCA will be certain to provide parents with a very clear and accurate picture of the NMCA learning experience so they can make the most appropriate choices for their children.

Connexus will allow for accurate collection and analysis of the school's demographic data. The data collected in this way will then be used to generate reports for the NMCA Governing Board and the state. It may also be used to evaluate and modify the school's outreach and recruiting strategies when necessary.

Enrollment: As a virtual school, NMCA will be able to accommodate all eligible students who may wish to attend within the cap. The NMCA enrollment team will assist parents in completing the required enrollment tasks and in meeting state -mandated enrollment requirements.

No tuition: As a public school, the charter school will not charge tuition or any fees that are prohibited. Outreach communications and the School Handbook will inform families that the school is tuition-free.

Non-sectarian: As a public school, the charter will be non-sectarian in its programs, admission policies, employment practices and all other operations.

Place of residence: Admission to the charter school will not be determined according to the place of residence of any pupil, or his or her parent or guardian, within New Mexico, except for such restrictions or preferences that are required or allowed by law. However, the school's enrollment process will include rigorous screening for verification of New Mexico residency (address check, etc.).

Admission methods and eligibility criteria: Through its recruitment/marketing and application guidance activities, NMCA will regularly disclose full details about its program and encourage families to carefully

consider its academic and parental involvement demands before applying. NMCA will also provide tools (such as contact with other NMCA parents, with permission, and contact with a Connections counselor, if desired) to help parents decide whether NMCA is truly the right fit for their children and themselves.

Enrollment begins with a declaration of student intent from each student who wishes to enroll in NMCA, including students who have an enrollment preference, which will include only such information as is needed to determine which grade, level or division of the school the student wishes to enter, and whether the student is eligible for a preference. The written declaration will be signed by the student's parent, guardian or legal guardian and submitted to the charter school within the deadline established by the charter school. The deadline will be set by the NMCA Governing Board so that sufficient time is allowed to conduct a lottery within the minimum of 30 days if the number of declarations of intent to enroll exceeds the number of students allowed in a grade, level or division of the charter school.

Should the number of declarations of intent to enroll be smaller than the maximum allowed in any grade, level or division of the charter school, NMCA will notify each student and his or her parent, guardian or legal guardian of the right to enroll in the upcoming school year, and will seek written commitment to enroll signed by the student and the parent, guardian, or legal guardian. The charter school may enroll students to fill remaining openings on a rolling, first come first serve, basis by completing enrollment forms.

Within 14 days of being notified of the eligibility to enroll in NMCA, each student must submit to NMCA a written form committing to enroll in the charter school in the upcoming school year, signed by the student's parent, guardian or legal guardian. An application form will be required for the student to complete after the student files a commitment to enroll form. The information will not be used to prevent or discourage a student from enrolling. Information sessions will be encouraged to attend to learn more about NMCA but will not be required. No test of ability or achievement will be used as a condition of enrollment.

Admissions requirements include the expectation that parents complete all enrollment and placement activities in a timely and complete fashion. Students will be subject to the current age restrictions for the state of New Mexico for public school admission and funding.

The NMCA Governing Board may annually select a date to close enrollment to the charter school. Typically, enrollment for the school year may close shortly after the beginning of the second semester. The public website will list the date that enrollment closes for that school year. The school reserves the right to admit a student to the school after enrollment closes, upon approval of the exception by the principal.

Specific state requirements for enrollment eligibility will be available for interested families on NMCA's webpage on the Connections website. NMCA will abide by all federal, state, and local policies and guidelines for student admission and will not impose admission requirements that are inconsistent with these policies and guidelines. This includes compliance with the McKinney-Vento Act regarding homeless students. The school leader or his/her designee shall serve as the liaison for homeless students.

At various times during the school year, to comply with mandated enrollment caps, state regulations and reporting, and/or testing processes and requirements, NMCA may temporarily "freeze" enrollment by holding on a wait list for defined period of time those students who are in "Pre-Approved" stage of enrollment. Once the temporary hold is over, students will again be able to move forward and/or complete the enrollment process. The Governing Board has delegated to the school leader the authority to define and implement these temporary hold periods. Students and families will be notified of these temporary hold dates.

Attendance: Students in this virtual public school program will not have physical classrooms but still must meet all regulatory requirements for attending public schools in the state. These requirements will be documented in the School-Specific Handbook Supplement (which will be finalized and approved by the Governing Board upon approval of the charter), but they will include completing the required number of hours of instruction. Caretakers and students are jointly responsible for ensuring that students meet their school's attendance requirements, and that the student's attendance is properly documented as required by the school.

School authorities are responsible for enforcing attendance laws, and students not attending school as mandated by law will be considered truant.

Although there is more flexibility in the Connections program than in a traditional school regarding when instruction occurs, students are still expected to follow the school calendar. Specific school calendars and the required days and hours of instruction are posted in the School-Specific Handbook Supplement.

Caretaker and Learning Coach Responsibilities for Attendance: State law requires that Caretakers take responsibility for ensuring that their student(s) attends school. Caretaker or designated Learning Coach will be required to record attendance daily. In addition, all students must complete assigned lessons and submit specified assessments to their teachers. Students and/or their Caretakers and/or Learning Coaches must also participate in/respond to regular telephone, WebMail message, and/or web conferencing (LiveLesson presentations) contacts, as well as in-person contacts (if required) with a teacher during the school's regularly scheduled school hours.

Elementary and Middle School: To meet attendance requirements and successfully complete their lessons, students in elementary and middle school will need assistance from a Learning Coach. The student's need for assistance will range from fairly substantial assistance to relatively minor assistance and will vary depending on the student's age, ability to be self-directed, and to comprehend the materials. In addition, students must be in a safe and secure environment, which generally requires that the student have adult supervision during the entire school day in order to meet health and safety regulations.

High School (Grades 9–12): Students are expected to perform their school work independently. However, the Learning Coach must still report daily attendance in Connexus and verify that the student has completed the assigned lessons and assessments. This adult is also expected to be available for regular teacher conferences. While students may not need adult supervision during the school day, they must still be in a safe and secure environment.

At Connections, the schools support an aggressive position towards equating attendance with the actual completion of work. Schools working with Connections do not accept logging on, or the submission of a parent's record of hours worked as sufficient proof that "attendance" has occurred. Schools will pursue a parent for truancy violations in situations where the student can't be confirmed as attending the school as documented by their work product. Work product is considered "attendance" which is a unique characteristic of online education.

Learning Coach recording attendance alone is not sufficient to properly verify student attendance. Teachers also verify attendance records on a regular basis and may change an attendance status if there is insufficient evidence to verify attendance, and/or if they are unable to determine if a student was participating in learning. In reviewing attendance documentation, teachers must determine that each student has met or exceeded the required amount of instructional time stipulated by each state's regulations. The State-Specific Handbook Supplement outlines how many learning hours or minutes must be demonstrated within a specific time frame.

Teachers may make changes to attendance records for the following reasons:

- *Upon request by a Learning Coach to record attendance*—If requested to do so by the Learning Coach, teachers may enter the appropriate attendance code in a blank attendance field because the Learning Coach is not able to access a computer or does not have Internet access, but the student has been able to continue his or her studies using offline materials. Teachers will note in the student's log the reason for the Learning Coach's request and may request additional documentation that the student was engaged in learning. This method of recording attendance should only be done in exceptional circumstances.
- *Upon request by a Learning Coach to correct an error*—If a Learning Coach makes an error entering the attendance code, he/she may request that the teacher enter the correct code. Teachers will note the basis for the request in the student's log and may request additional documentation.

- *Upon review by a teacher or other authorized school staff to validate attendance*—A teacher or authorized school staff member will change the number of hours worked to a “0,” or the “present” code may be changed to an excused or unexcused absence code, if, after communication with the family the teacher or staff member believes there is insufficient evidence to support that the student was in attendance (e.g., insufficient lesson completion, teacher contact, and/or assessment completion).

In all cases, a teacher or another school staff member will discuss with the Learning Coach any perceived differences between the student’s recorded attendance and his or her documented lessons completed and assessments submitted. If the teacher or other school staff member makes any changes to the student’s attendance record in Connexus, he or she will promptly inform the Learning Coach and document the change in the student’s log. Learning Coaches who have disputes related to attendance should follow the dispute resolution procedures in the State-Specific Handbook Supplement.

See Education Plan Section II which describes the multiple assessments, both formal and informal, that NMCA will utilize. Teachers will monitor and verify student progress and performance through a variety of means including curriculum-based assessments (CBAs), NMCA’s quick and effective way of gathering formative information on students’ understanding of concepts. The mandatory regularly scheduled phone conversations between the teacher and student offer a valuable opportunity to conduct these assessments. Teachers conduct two types of CBAs: verification curriculum-based Assessment (VCBA) or diagnostic curriculum-based assessment (DCBA). This adds a level of accountability and verification of student work.

In addition to the assessment methods described previously, Connexus gathers very granular data on every student’s performance daily. During each phase of their curriculum mastery, students will engage in many different types of evaluations, both formal and informal. Formal assessments include quizzes, unit tests, skills checks, portfolio items and graded discussions. Informal assessments include the variety of methods teachers use to gather ongoing feedback about student progress from both Learning Coaches and students, such as WebMail, LiveLessons, phone conversations, and review of student work samples.

Students should expect work to be graded, based on the assignment and format, from immediately to up to one week, with the average being 24-hour turnaround time. In addition to formal graded assignments, teachers continuously monitor student work via Connexus, noting performance on machine-graded quizzes and checks for understanding and reaching out to students via telephone CBAs to verify student work and/or diagnose difficulties in mastering discrete skills and concepts. Connexus tracks teacher response time and teacher-student/teacher-parent communications, providing the school Principal with rich, actionable data on this key aspect of teacher performance.

Withdrawing from School: Students may withdraw from the school at any time in accordance with NM statute. Prior to withdrawing, the Learning Coach and/or student will be encouraged to discuss with the school staff the student’s reason(s) for withdrawing as it may be possible to address issues so that the student does not need to withdraw. This data will be recorded and will be reviewed by the Principal to continually reflect on the school’s ability to serve the families and students in its charter.

I. Legal Compliance

- 1. Describe how your governing body will ensure compliance with NMSA 1978 22-8B-5.2 (2011), which deals with conflicts of interest. Attach as Appendix G a copy of your proposed Conflict of Interest Policy and a sample disclosure statement of any real or potential conflict of interest.**

The NMCA Governing Board will be in compliance with NMSA 1978 22-8B-5.2 (2011) as outlined in Appendix G which deals with conflicts of interest. A person shall not serve as a member of a governing body of a charter school if the person or a family member has a financial interest. No member shall participate in selecting, awarding, or administering a contract if a conflict exists. An employee of NMCA or Connections is not eligible to serve on the Governing Board. See Appendix G for more details.

2. Describe what steps your governing body and school will take to ensure that the operations of the school and governing body are transparent and open to the public.

The Governing Board will meet at least eight times per year, but will meet more often if needed to conduct school business in a timely fashion. The regular NMCA Governing Board meetings will typically be held at the local NMCA office and according to the schedule that will be set by the Governing Board at their Annual Meeting and as set forth in the Open Meetings Act annual resolution. Governing Board members will be allowed to attend telephonically, according to the limitations of the Open Meetings Act. The agenda for all meetings will be posted at the location of the meeting in accordance with Open Meeting laws NMSA 1978, Sections 10-15-1 to 10-15-4 and will also be posted on the School's website or any other location identified in the annual resolution to ensure reasonable notice to the public and the school's constituency. The public may directly address the Governing Board at meetings, and members of the public, including parents, will also be able to attend Governing Board meetings via teleconference upon advance request in a manner described in the annual resolution of the Governing Board. All Governing Board members shall be provided training on compliance with the Open Meetings Act.

The Governing Board may also create ad hoc parent/Learning Coach advisory groups to provide guidance on particular subjects such as community partnerships and neighborhood outreach. Parents who are not Governing Board members are also encouraged to be involved with Governing Board activities; contact and other information about the Governing Board will be available through the school website and the public website, the school will make all Governing Board minutes available to families on request and will report on Governing Board activities in the school newsletter. A complete explanation of the Governing Board's due process framework will be included in the school handbook provided to every family upon enrollment.

NMCA will comply with the New Mexico Inspection of Public Records Act, NMSA 1978, Section 14-2-1, *et seq.* The school will appoint a records custodian, post required notices and provide its staff and Governing Board with training on compliance.

J. Evidence of Partnership/Contractor relationship (if applicable)

1. If the school has identified a partner organization or contractor that is essential to the existence of the charter school, its governance, key instructional, or management functions, provide the following information: Name of the entity or person, contact information; a description of the nature and purpose of the relationship with the charter school; and the involvement in the school's governance.

NMCA has plans to contract with Connections Academy of New Mexico, LLC, to provide the virtual educational program outlined in this charter and is given authority to do so by NMSA 1978 22-8B-4R which states that a charter school may contract with a "party for provision of financial management,....., facilities, education-related services or other services." The Statement of Work Agreement details the respective roles of the NMCA Governing Board and Connections (see Appendix H) and the services provided comply with the statute. It is important to note that the contract does not include management of the school, which is prohibited by NMSA 1978 22-8B-4R. The NMCA Governing Board will maintain responsibility for ensuring that the charter school program meets all educational, fiscal and programmatic goals outlined in the charter. The NMCA Governing Board will regularly review the services and will set expectations for reporting from Connections to the Governing Board. Under the Statement of Work, Connections shall be subject to a performance review, conducted at the NMCA Governing Board's discretion. The NMCA Governing Board will have the right to terminate its contract with Connections if performance obligations are not met and Connections is unable to cure such deficiency after being given reasonable notice, the details of which are described in the Statement of Work Agreement.

Connections' curriculum brings together "best of class" materials from leading education publishers and other content providers. Each year the curriculum is reevaluated and newly available materials to improve and enhance instruction are assessed by the Connections curriculum team. Texts, materials, and online content from their partners are supplemented with additional instructional content and activities developed by their own curriculum specialists. Together they create a rigorous curriculum that prepares students for academic success. All the textbooks, lesson plans, and materials—everything needed for a high-quality learning experience at

home, is provided. Connections' advanced technology allows a quality public education to be delivered straight into student's home or other location. With proprietary interactive web tools, online lesson plans and instruction, its own internal email, and secure community message boards. Most importantly, the curriculum allows for constant parent, student, and teacher input through a five-star ranking system that allows for continuous school improvement.

The quality of teachers is also very important to the NMCA Governing Board especially providing access in a rural state like New Mexico. The NMCA Governing Board believes that in partnering with Connections, high quality teachers knowledgeable in their content areas will be attracted to join the team. With their solid content knowledge and passion for individualizing instruction, Connections' professional development will provide them with the necessary skills and pedagogy to teach online and maximize their skill set statewide. The Governing Board agrees with Arne Duncan, United States Secretary of Education, who stated on June 26, 2012 that "Every educator needs to be connected with the best digital content, tools, and resources in order to enliven the learning environment for students, and to fully connect with peers and experts." The professional development of teachers in an online environment is central to Connections, where teachers never stop learning, so they can continue to excel at teaching. The Professional Learning Community is a virtual community created and dedicated to shared values and vision, working and learning collaboratively, shared decision-making, collective creativity, and supportive and shared leadership. Teachers get connected to the latest educational conferences, webinars, online courses, professional organizations, and research/education updates. Teachers are encouraged to share and collaborate with colleagues across the country. Connections educators stay in the know about new products and resources, through continued collaboration and participation in regular curriculum meetings. Teachers stay on top of pertinent school news and announcements through weekly issues of the *Teacher Update*, as well as bimonthly meetings with the top curriculum development experts. This provides teachers the opportunity to provide feedback and ask questions about a variety of instructional topics. The NMCA Governing Board believes that high quality teachers paired with superior professional development opportunities will create a school where students throughout New Mexico will benefit.

In addition to the information shared throughout this application, Connections has built a solid national reputation in their work with charter schools, school districts, and state departments of education across the country over the last 10 years that the Founding Board found impressive. The Founding Board felt that Connections' has a proven record of success in collaborating with public virtual schools, consistent strong ratings from parents, proven acceptance of its students to highly regarded colleges and universities, strong governing boards, and passionate testimonials from families about their successful experience. The Founding Board strongly believes that Connections is a critical partner to achieve the school's mission to help each student maximize his or her potential and meet the highest performance standards through a uniquely individualized learning program in grades K-12 throughout the state of New Mexico for students who need an alternative to the traditional classroom.

The Founding Board was diligent in this selection of a partner. Members of the NMCA Founding Board visited the Colorado Connections Academy school and spoke to current Connections' families, teachers, principal, and the authorizer (Mapleton School District Superintendent) to get questions openly and honestly answered. The purpose of the conversations was to learn about online education, understand about the experiences of working with Connections, and discuss any challenges. The Founding Board believes Connections operates in an open and transparent manner and will expect that of them throughout the contract. Connections' experience and performance, as described in Section II Education Plan, in the 21 other states they served in 2011-12, will benefit NMCA and its students. Connections is a decade ahead of where the NMCA Founding Board would be without such a high quality partner. The Founding Board believes this partnership will create a charter school that is setting new standards of excellence in the virtual school arena and will positively impact student learning.

The key contact person from Connections to the Founding Board members is Dr. Donna Hutchison, a credentialed educator and expert in online education. Dr. Hutchison serves as Vice President State Relations for Connections Education where she focuses on board relations, legislative activities, and partnership with districts, state departments of education, and other entities. Dr. Hutchison has been a great resource for the Founding Board with over 17 years experience in online education. She worked from 1993 to 2002 at Boise State

University's Department of Educational Technology in the College of Education. Prior to joining Connections in 2010, Dr. Hutchison served as the Chief Executive Officer from 2002–2010 of the Idaho Digital Learning Academy, the state virtual school. She received her Doctorate in Education from the University of Idaho, her Masters degree in Educational Technology from Boise State University, and her Bachelors in Marketing and Management Information Systems from the University of Virginia. She is a certified teacher in Business, Social Studies, Professional Technical Education, and Mathematics. The Founding Board is confident that Dr. Hutchison has the expertise, education, and knowledge of online learning, school administration, and charter schools to be a great resource to the Governing Board and serve as the contact from Connections to the Governing Board.

The Founding Board also has access to a great local educational expert who is a senior member of Connections/Pearsons²⁷ leadership team, Dr. Alan Morgan. Dr. Morgan served twelve years as the State Superintendent of Public Instruction for New Mexico prior to his retirement from the public sector in 1997. Prior to serving as state superintendent, he taught elementary school, supervised student teachers, and held numerous administrative positions in the New Mexico State Department of Education. As State Superintendent of Public Instruction, he was the Constitutional Officer charged with oversight of 89 school districts, 36,000 employees of the public schools, and an annual operating budget of two billion dollars. His career-long vision for public education has focused upon state leadership through clear standards, responsible assessments, and reasonable accountability. Dr. Morgan has a strong interest in insuring the success of New Mexico Connections Academy and how it can meet the needs of students throughout New Mexico.

There are no plans to have additional contractual relationships that would be central to the school's operation or mission beyond the agreement with Connections Education.

2. Attach a copy of the proposed contract or evidence of the terms of the proposed agreement with the partnership or contractor as Appendix H.

See Appendix H.

K. Waivers

1. Identify the waivers as provided for in NMSA 1978 22-8B-5(c) that you are requesting and describe how use of this waiver will support the school's plan.

NMSA 1978 22-8B-5 (C)	Requested		Description of how waiver will support school's plan
	Yes	No	
Individual Class Load 6.29.1.9 G NMAC	X		NMCA requests a waiver of the individual class load requirements. Online education allows a flexibility of class size because classroom management, distractions, and other factors are not an issue in a virtual classroom. The individualization of the Personalized Learning Plan, the use of technology, and the design of the curriculum creates the ability to purposely assign class loads based upon student outcomes desired, interaction requirements, and course design. Classes such as Advanced Placement which require high student-teacher interaction will have low teacher-student ratios (i.e. 15:1) but other courses like Home Life or Educational Technology & Online Learning may have higher ratios.
Teaching Load 6.29.1.9 G NMAC	X		NMCA requests a waiver of teaching load. Teaching loads will be assigned based upon a national metric for similar curriculum, course content, grade level, and student learning outcomes for similar affiliated virtual schools. This waiver is also requested in order to meet the enrollment and program demands requested by NM families.

²⁷ Pearson acquired Connections Education in November 2011.

Length of School Day 6.29.1.9 I NMAC	X		NMCA is a rigorous curriculum but provides a level of flexibility in scheduling. NMCA will meet the minimum hourly requirements for kindergarten, grades 1-6, and grades 7-12 per year. Each week will average 30 hours of work per week recognizing that individualized learning plans for students vary according to performance.
Staffing Pattern 22-10A-20 NMSA 1978	X		NMCA may use alternative staffing patterns to address enrollment and program demands requested by NM families.
Subject Areas 6.61.9.8 B NMAC	X		NMCA anticipates requesting a waiver in rare cases where flexibility for endorsements may be needed. This could occur most likely when the school is small but it is not anticipated it will be needed when the school grows.
Purchase of Instructional Materials 6.75.2 et seq. NMAC	X		NMCA's curriculum requires materials that will be acquired from sources that are not on the NMPED instructional materials list. All materials acquired will support the instructional program as outlined in the Education Plan of the charter application.
Evaluation Standards for School Personnel 6.69.3 NMAC and 6.69.7 NMAC	X		School Personnel will be evaluated with the standards in 6.69.3 thru 6.69.7 that are applicable to an online environment. Additional standards will be added that are specific and applicable to the mission and vision of NMCA.
School Principal Duties 22-10A-18 NMSA 1978	X		The principal will be hired and report to the NMCA Governing Board. The principal will not report to a local school district superintendent. NMCA's principal shall hire all employees, fix the salaries of, assign, terminate, and discharge all employees of the charter school.
Drivers Education 22-13-12 NMSA 1978	X		The school plans to seek approval for its online driver's education course. Pending approval, it will provide links to other approved online providers. NMCA may assist students with locating driving schools/instructors but the students will be responsible for obtaining this education if desired.

2. **Identify any discretionary waivers as provided for in NMSA 1978 22-8B-5C or elsewhere in the Public School Code that you are requesting and describe how use of this waiver will support the school's plan. If this is an application to the local district, you must identify all waivers you are requesting from local board policies.**

There are no other waivers requested except for what is requested in K a.

L. Transportation and Food

1. **Describe the school's plan for meeting the transportation needs of its students and plans for contracting services for transportation (if applicable).**

Students at NMCA, which will serve students statewide, will not require transportation services for regular school activities which will occur primarily in their homes and immediate vicinities. The only mandatory school events that may require students to report somewhere other than their home or immediate neighborhood will be: a) special orientation sessions, and b) state standardized tests, which students will take at proctored locations.

2. **Describe the school's plan for meeting the food services needs of its students and any plans for contracting with approved/appropriate food services vendors (if applicable).**

NMCA will serve students statewide who will not be attending a physical brick and mortar school building and will not be offered a food service program. Parents will be fully informed of this fact prior to their students' enrollment in the school so that they may make the best school choice for their family. For purposes of demographic documentation, however, NMCA will request during the enrollment process that families who qualify for Free or Reduced Price Meals – based on past eligibility for these services or current family income –

so identify themselves. The purpose of collecting this information is to ensure that the school will be prepared to arrange supplemental educational resources available to students and the school based on incidence of poverty. Parents will be fully informed that volunteering this information will not entitle their family to meal service. NMCA staff will refer families who qualify for Free or Reduced Price Meals to local social service agencies for food assistance upon request. In the event that the federally funded lunch program is changed to permit the distribution of direct assistance to families, NMCA will be prepared to seek funds to provide this service.

M. Facilities

- 1. Attach the documentation that the school's detailed description of the charter school's projected facility needs, including projected request for capital outlay assistance, has been approved by the director of the New Mexico Public School Facilities Authority as Appendix I.**

See Appendix I for the approval letter from New Mexico Public School Facilities Authority and the plan.

- 2. Describe the efforts you have taken to identify a facility for your proposed school. (It is not required that you disclose a specific facility that is under consideration.)**

NMCA will lease permanent office space for administrative and teaching staff, to serve as a "teaching center" where the school's administrative and teaching staff will work, which may also serve as a resource center for students. The initial physical facility will need to be flexible for growth and future needs. The teaching center will include at least one conference room with doors for use in IEP conferences and other special education related activities by the NMCA staff.

NMCA will analyze locations, including any potential shared/joint use facilities, based upon criteria needed to run an effective virtual school. Preliminary analysis of suitable locations is included in the Facilities Plan. Because a facility will not be needed until late Spring 2013 (ideally), it is premature to perform a detailed analysis of facilities as the rental properties available will be significantly different in 6-9 months. Online education requires minimal build out that can be accomplished in the timeframe needed.

The following are some of the criteria NMCA will use to analyze facilities:

- Central location
- Easy access from major roadways, allowing students and staff from various areas to reach it easily. The facility will have adequate space for teacher cubicles, a Principal's office, a conference room, and a break room/kitchenette.
- The facility will have a certificate of occupancy, be air-conditioned, heated and illuminated with fluorescent lights, provide male and female bathrooms and parking, will be handicapped accessible, and will be fully equipped with sprinklers and other fire safety equipment.
- The facility will provide the necessary infrastructure to support the required computer network.
- The school estimates approximately 125 square feet per person to meet its minimum requirements, allowing for necessary common space, egress, typical build out for conference room and kitchen(ette).
- Office space is in compliance with or capable of modification to bring it into compliance with all local building, zoning and health and safety requirements.
- Office is located close to at least one main thoroughfare to allow for ease of access by teachers as well as by visiting students and parents.
- Office meets all local minimum Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards.
- Office has ample parking accommodations.
- Office is available to move-in within 3-6 months from the date of search.
- Office is comprised of approximately 20% office space and 80% open area for cubicles.

Because students will be present in the school headquarters only on the rare drop-in basis, and will not gather there for instructional activities, no special zoning will be required beyond standard commercial use.

3. What is the applicant's plan for funding the school's facility, including rent, maintenance, equipment and repairs.

The Governing Board intends to seek Lease Reimbursement funding in order to pay for the actual costs of the lease agreement for the teaching/learning center. The school anticipates limited capital needs except for the initial build out of the facility which would include furniture and workstation materials. The build-out will be a straight office environment and will work with the landlord to provide a turn-key solution with standard building finishes. The Governing Board/Facility team will provide a CAD test fit so the landlord will prepare the space pursuant to that test fit. Given this method of securing space, the capital plan primarily provides the space layout and understands the landlord's amortization schedule for tenant improvements. It is anticipated that minimal maintenance, equipment, and repairs due to the nature of the facility needs for virtual learning will be required.

Upon approval of the charter, we will investigate and examine facilities that meet the 2015 requirements and our site requirements as outlined in the approved Facilities plan.

IV. Business Plan

A. Budgets

1. SEG Worksheets (Appendix J)

See Appendix J for the SEG Worksheets.

2. Proposed 5 year budget plan (Appendix K)

See Appendix K for the Proposed 5 year budget plans.

3. Provide a detailed narrative description of the revenue and expenditure assumptions on which the proposed 5-year budget plan is based. Present budget priorities that are consistent with and support key parts of the plan including the school's mission, educational program, staffing and facility. Present realistic evidenced-based revenue and expenditures assumptions.

The New Mexico Connections Academy (NMCA) Governing Board will develop an annual budget and analyze cash flow needs carefully. The proposed SEG Worksheets are included in Appendix J and the 5 year budget is included in Appendix K. Both are carefully aligned to the mission and vision of the school.

Fiscal year: The fiscal year for NMCA will be July 1 through June 30, as required by law.

Budget highlights and assumptions: The attached budget for the 2013-14 year of operation and beyond demonstrates a school with sound financial planning as summarized below.

Cash inflows and assumptions: Funding has been based on conservative estimates of available pupil funding from several sources and conservative attendance estimates. Enrollment figures are based on the projections for the initial size of the school and subsequent school growth.

1. **Enrollment and Growth:** The enrollment figures were calculated based upon the estimated demand of virtual learning in the state described in the *Keeping Pace with K-12 Online Learning: An Annual Review of Policy and Practice (2011)*²⁸. New Mexico state demand is estimated to be approximately 2% of the total K-12 school enrollment or 6,500 students based upon similar states. NMCA enrollment figures are a subset of the estimated overall state demand. School growth has been projected based on the experience of similar schools in similar locations. Preliminary interest in the school has been evaluated by the thousands of families who have expressed interest in the school via multiple online efforts without any direct outreach. In addition, the school options currently available in New Mexico were also taken into account in the development of the funding projections. The enrollment is anticipated to be 500 in Year 1 with steady growth for the subsequent years reaching a maximum enrollment of 2,000 in Year 5.
2. **State Equalization Guarantee (SEG):** SEG funding for the 2013-14 budget uses conservatively estimated rates. Estimates of these rates were obtained from the New Mexico Public Education Department School Budget and Finance Analysis Bureau who provided budget preparation instruction for applicants at the February training. The SEG estimate uses the unit value of \$3,598.87 and not the updated April unit value of \$3,668.18 per guidance at the training. The budget also assumes that rates over the five year period remain flat, following the training recommendation. A 2% fee for the Commission is included.
3. **Special Education and Other Funds:** The school expects that approximately 12% of enrolled students will be eligible for an IEP or 504 plan and qualify for Special Education Services Allowance, however, a conservative estimate of 0% is included in Year 1 and 5% is included in subsequent years, per the charter school training guidance (no C or D level students are included in the estimate). Other grants and programs, such as Federal Title, may be available to the school but have not been shown in the budget. In addition, only basic membership is used in calculating enrollment. There are no fine arts, bilingual or

²⁸ <http://kpk12.com/>

other programs included in the budget estimate. They will be included in future budgets as they are awarded and consistent with NMPED budgeting requirements.

4. **Indices:** The At-risk Index is based upon Santa Fe's At-risk index. The At-risk Index is based upon where the facility is located and will stay consistent regardless of actual numbers. The Teaching and Education index (T&E) is also based upon Santa Fe's actual T&E index. After approval and year one actual, the T&E index will be based upon NMCA's actual T&E. Both index assumptions were based upon guidance from the New Mexico Public Education Department School Budget and Finance Analysis Bureau at the February training.
5. **Reserve Balances:** A cumulative reserve has been targeted for the first five years of operation in order to keep with conservative and fiscally responsible budgeting practices. Please note that a reserve balance is not included on the 5 year budget sheets. For the purposes of this budget, revenue and expenses result in a zero fund balance per guidance of the charter application process.
6. **Lease Payment Assistance:** Lease payment assistance is not calculated as revenue for purposes of this budget per guidance per NMPED School Budget and Finance Bureau instructions to new applicants and the New Mexico Coalition for Charter School training recommended by the PED. It is the intent of the NMCA Founding Board to seek assistance for lease reimbursement based upon actual costs of the lease agreement (s). It is possible that additional facilities may be established throughout the state, depending on student need as the school continues to grow in collaboration with PSFA.
7. **Capital Outlay:** Capital Outlay is also not calculated as revenue for purposes of this budget per guidance from NMPED School Budget and Finance Bureau instructions to new applicants and the New Mexico Coalition for Charter School training recommended by the PED. Based upon our understanding of the current funding environment, NMCA does not intend to initially pursue capital outlay funds other than Lease Payment Assistance, especially if these funds were to significantly impact the finances of the Santa Fe School District or other districts where additional school facilities may reside. We recognize that many students who attend NMCA will be outside of the Santa Fe School District boundaries and that locally generated capital dollars do not follow the students. The school intends to be a good partner and neighbor to the local school district. The NMCA Founding Board looks forward to exploring ways to collaborate with the district on funds for which the school may be eligible in the future to benefit student learning, especially in the area of technology, without financially harming the district.

Cash outflow and assumptions: Cash outflow assumptions are based upon reasonable estimates of anticipated expenses and are aligned to the mission and performance goals of NMCA.

1. **Teaching and administrative staff:** A key component of the mission of NMCA is a high quality teaching staff, with a specific focus on teachers with STEM experience. Teaching staff are budgeted based on the staffing ratios that have been found to be effective in other similar schools (see Staffing tabs of budget for details of staffing ratios and salaries). Staff budgets and staffing numbers have been prepared to meet requirements for full funding and student learning outcomes. The attached budget provides for a student to teacher ratio (on an FTE basis) ranging from 43:1 to 26:1 over the five-year budget period. Year 1 has the highest student-teacher ratio due to conservative budget projections and associated cash flow; however, virtual education provides for increased flexibility due to the nature of instruction and associated student outcomes, so the board is confident that the goals of the school will be met. Administrative staff includes certificated positions, such as the principal, assistant principal, special education manager, ELL coordinator, and counseling manager as well as classified positions and administrative support. Benefit expenses were calculated using rates provided by the New Mexico Public Schools Insurance Authority and the New Mexico Educational Retirement Board. Substitute teachers are usually not required in the virtual environment, as the staff of the school can typically cover when a colleague is absent. The Charter School does intend, however, to identify some substitute teaching resources to address longer-term absences if needed. The salaries will meet or exceed the requirements in statute for minimum salaries for teaching and administration in order to attract and retain high quality teaching personnel especially in the STEM areas. See Appendix L for proposed salary schedule. In addition, instructional staff will be eligible to earn additional income through the innovative career ladder program, as described in Section III, the school intends to offer.

- 5 Year Budget Fund Codes: Function 1000 Instruction 2100 Support Services, and 2400 School Administration under salaries and benefits
2. **High quality instructional program including materials and technology tools:** One of the missions of NMCA is to individualize instruction. To support this mission, a significant portion of the budget is dedicated to this area. The budget shows each type of expense and the method for calculating it (e.g., per student, per teacher, or percent). The NMCA Board anticipates purchasing access to complete proprietary lesson plans, high-quality digital and/or print textbooks, CD-ROMs, online licensed content, interactive lesson components, synchronous instruction tools, digital and/or physical science and art kits, and state of the art technology training, test preparation and assessment tools from Connections. A list of materials for each grade is presented to the charter school board annually. In addition, the board anticipates contracting with Connections for use of Connexus®, which includes a student information system, lesson scheduling tools, accountability tools, webmail, instant messaging, secure chat, video and audio streaming for selected lessons and a message board/forum. Data is a key component of individualizing instruction and is included in the highly regarded proprietary Connexus® product.
 - 5 Year Budget Fund Codes: Function 1000 Instruction – 56112 & 56113; Function 2100 Support Services Student 56113; Function 2200 Support Services Instruction 56113 & 56114
 3. **Professional and Technical Services:** The budget includes services for professional and technical services to support the school’s mission. The mission of NMCA is to help each K-12 student maximize his/her educational potential through high quality teachers, individualized instruction, and involved parents with a focus on STEM. Professional development and professional learning communities for teachers are key services for meeting the NMCA’s mission including learning how to teach online and a focus on continuous school improvement and learning outcomes. This includes student-teacher technology support, the Educational Resource Center for teachers, professional development, STEM contract services like Explora mobile labs, student testing, assessment services, administrative, enrollment, board services, auditing, legal, and accounting services. Technology support, student assessment, enrollment/placement, and other services are the foundation to individualize instruction and meet the mission of NMCA.
 - 5 Year Budget Fund Codes: Function 1000 Instruction – 53414 & 53711; Function 2100 Support Services Student 53414 & 53711; Function 2200 Support Services Instruction 53414 & 53711; Function 2300 General Administration 53411, 53413, & 53711; Function 2500 Central Services 53414, 53711, & 55915
 4. **Computers and Internet Reimbursement:** The budget provides loaned computers and Internet reimbursements to 33% of enrolled families in year 1 and 100% of families in subsequent years. This percentage of reimbursement is higher than typical. Due to the rural areas of the state and the percent of free and reduced lunch students, the board believes that a widespread computer and internet reimbursement offering are warranted. NMCA will provide a Technology Hardship Program to offer loaned computers and Internet service to families with demonstrated need in Year 1. It is important to NMCA that technology and Internet barriers do not prevent a disadvantaged family from participating in this school. After year 1, all families will be covered under the computer and Internet Reimbursement offering which will insure consistent technology and access across the school. Please note that this expense is not an asset expense by the school but a leased expense as noted under General Supplies & Materials. The NMCA Board has an option to contract with Connections to lease technology and technology services as outlined in the Statement of Work as an optional service. Contracting for equipment and services ensures that NMCA and its students have the latest technology to experience the greatest benefit from the program. Obsolescence protection, cash flow management, environmental safety and disposal of equipment, and overall risk minimization are all reasons why contracting for technology equipment and access delivery as a service may make sense for the school.
 - 5 Year Budget Fund Codes: Function 1000 Instruction –56118, 2400; Function School Administration 56118

5. **Facilities:** The school plans to lease local office space as a teaching center and will attempt to find public buildings. Site location will be determined through a thorough review process based upon facility, instructional needs, and enrollment projections and will include extensive review in the Santa Fe area (see Appendix I for approved PSFA facility plan). Teachers and staff members will work at the facility. Upon approval by the principal, some teachers may spend some days working in locations other than the office. Connections provides computers and Internet access and technical support for staff while they are performing their job duties from any location. As the school grows, additional teaching centers throughout the state may be considered by the governing board and will be reviewed with the PSFA as outlined in the PSFA plan. The typical office space rental includes all costs in the monthly rate, so the square footage lease costs are shown in the budget combined with all services (including utilities, fire & security, custodial, waste management), except phone and Internet, which are budgeted separately due to the higher cost of these services in a virtual school. The budget does not include expenses associated with a lease but also does not show the associated revenue (see narrative on Facility Lease Reimbursement) in the Assumptions section. However, other expenses associated with facilities are outlined in the budget including communication expenses associated with a virtual school and expenses associated with school facility planning in collaboration with PSFA.

- 5 Year Budget Fund Codes: Function 2600 Operation and Maintenance of Plant

6. **Tutoring and Student/Family Outreach/Training:** To support students who need additional services, funds are dedicated in the budget for tutoring and family outreach/training. NMCA will increase parent outreach activities to help parents support their child's education. Parent involvement is part of the mission of NMCA and is supported in the budget. Online tutoring is a key component of support for the personalized learning plan and individualized instruction. Live lessons, which may be one on one with the student or gathering a small group of students together with similar needs, with teachers ensure that students receive the necessary support with challenging lessons or on the student's Personalized Learning Plan (PLP). Conversations about the PLP, including both academic and non-academic goals, with learning coaches and students ensure success with the lessons and academics. This budget category also includes face to face field trips throughout the state and other activities that are associated with family outreach and support for learning.

- 5 Year Budget Fund Codes: Function 1000 Instruction –55813, 55814, 55817, 55818, 55819, 55820, & 55915

4. Present viable strategies for meeting potential budget and cash-flow shortfalls, particularly for the first year of operation.

Overall cash flow

NMCA intends to contract with Connections Academy of New Mexico, LLC to provide the virtual educational program for the charter school. Connections provides, among other services, human resources, clerical, financial, accounting and payroll services that the charter school may purchase under the SOW and are integrated within Connexus®. The services provided are explained in the Statement of Work Agreement between the charter school and Connections Academy of New Mexico, LLC. To the extent that the board uses Connections as its pay agent for the sake of convenience for the board, those expenses are reimbursed to Connections (such as payroll expenses, facility costs, etc.) for actual costs incurred. Because of the various services that will be provided by Connections, including curriculum and Connexus® access, the charter school will be invoiced monthly by Connections Academy of New Mexico, LLC, and the charter school board, its finance committee, and its fiscal agent will review and approve these invoices prior to payment to Connections Academy of New Mexico, LLC. Payment to Connections will only be made when the school has available funds to do so. There will be no penalty or interest charge if payment to Connections is delayed for this reason. Furthermore, many of the products and services that will be purchased from Connections will be done on a per student basis, thus many costs that are typically fixed in nature will become variable. This will provide a better match of expenses to available funds and cushion the school financially from an enrollment shortfall. There are

multiple layers of accountability to ensure that the NMCA Governing Board is a good fiscal steward of New Mexico education funds and provides a quality educational experience to students.

5. Attach a proposed salary schedule for licensed or certified staff (see Appendix L).

See Appendix L for a proposed salary schedule and the estimates included in the budget calculations.

B. Financial Policies, Oversight, Compliance and Sustainability

1. Provide a detailed plan indicating how the charter school will manage its fiscal responsibilities that is aligned with and supports the school's educational program, staffing plan and job descriptions, and that demonstrates an understanding of the school's financial management obligations.

New Mexico Connections Academy (NMCA) is well-positioned to ensure that its financial plans are adequate and that its financial systems comply with the Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP) necessary for sound financial management.

The NMCA Governing Board is responsible for the overall financial management of the school. The Board will designate at least two members of the board as a finance subcommittee per NMSA 22-8-12.3. The finance subcommittee shall make recommendations to the board for financial planning, review of financial statements, monitoring of revenues and expenses, annual budget preparation and oversight, and procurement. In addition, the finance committee will serve as an external monitoring committee on budget and financial matters. The finance committee will lead the Board in developing necessary policies and procedures during the pre-operational period. The NMCA Governing Board intends to hire the services of a Licensed Business Official and has budgeted an increase in the level of services, and associated expense, as the school grows. The Licensed Business Official will be an integral part of the school team and will report directly to the principal, the Governing Board and its finance committee.

The Governing Board will also appoint an audit committee that consists of two board members, one volunteer member who is a parent of a student, and one volunteer member who has experience in accounting or financial matters. The principal and the certified business official/business manager shall be ex-officio members of the committee. The purpose of the audit committee will be to attend the entrance and exit conferences for annual and special audits, meet with external financial auditors, be accessible to the financial auditors, track and report progress on the findings, advise the board of the findings and recommended policy changes, and provide other advice and assistance as requested (NMSA 22-8-12.3). Finally, the Governing Board may, but is not required to, engage another independent accounting firm to review expenditures on a periodic basis prior to the audit.

Finally upon approval of the charter, the NMCA Governing Board will apply to be a board of finance per 6.80.4(16) NMAC. In addition, the individual(s) who will be given the responsibility of keeping the financial records of the charter school shall complete an affidavit describing the training completed, professional licensure held and degrees earned by them. Every member of the governing body will also sign a statement that the governing body agrees to consult with the department on any matter not covered by the manual of accounting and budgeting before taking any action relating to funds held as a board of finance, a signed affidavit from each governing body member declaring that the member is not a governing body member of any other charter school, and that the member was not a governing body member of another charter school that was suspended or failed to receive or maintain their board of finance designation. NMCA will also present a letter from Poms & Associates verifying that the charter school is a participant in the public school insurance authority and states that the person who will be entrusted with handling the funds of the charter school is adequately insured.

2. Provide a description of the internal control procedures the school will utilize to safeguard assets, segregate its payroll and other check disbursement duties, provide reliable financial information, promote operational efficiency and insure compliance with all applicable federal and state statutes, regulations, and rules relative to the school's procedures.

NMCA will develop a GAAP-compliant financial and accounting plan in accordance with NMAC 6.20.2 that will provide an accurate accounting of all of its finances, will ensure sufficient information for audit purposes, and will provide data in the format needed to submit accurate and timely Annual Financial Reports to the Department. Specific elements of the NMCA financial accounting plan are as follows.

Budgeting Process: The development of NMCA's annual budget will be an iterative process that will incorporate input from key stakeholders every step of the way. A preliminary budget based on initial assumptions will be presented by the Finance Committee to the Governing Board. It will then be approved by the Governing Board after required public input has been obtained and before the start of the school year. Once the beginning enrollment and updated per pupil funding figures are known, a revised budget will be prepared for the Finance Committee and the Board's consideration. This budget will then be compared to actual and forecasted results on a monthly basis as described under Financial Reporting/Internal below. PED approval will be sought for any revisions in the NMCA approved budget.

Accounting System: As part of its process to acquire the services of a Licensed Business Official, NMCA will require that this individual/firm use an industry-accepted and widely-adopted accounting software that is compatible with the State's reporting requirements. The accounting software used will also be required to include strong controls, data integrity and backup, and data security.

Internal Financial Controls: NMCA will institute rigorous internal financial controls as follows.

- ***Segregation of Duties:*** NMCA will develop and maintain simple check request and purchase order forms to document the authorization of non-payroll expenditures. All proposed expenditures must be approved by the Principal, who will review the proposed expenditure to determine whether it is consistent with the Board-adopted budget and sign the check request form. All approved check requests and purchase orders will be provided to the Finance Committee and will be signed by a Board member who has been approved as a signatory on the school's checking account to initiate payment. All transactions will be posted on an electronic general ledger by the Licensed Business Official. To ensure segregation of recording and authorization, the Licensed Business Official will not have authorization to access the school's bank accounts.
- ***Authorization and Processing of Disbursements:*** To ensure fiscal responsibility and compliance, the Finance Committee and the Governing Board will meet regularly to review the operations and financial performance of the school. The Licensed Business Official will be required to provide supporting documentation for all expenditures. The school will not authorize any payment until it has reviewed such support. The Board will establish fiscal policies covering school expenditures. It will also designate specific check signing authority.
- ***Safeguard Assets:*** All state, federal, and other monies received by the charter school will be deposited in NMCA's accounts within 24 hours or one banking day of receipt per federal and state regulations (NMSA 1978 Sections 22-8-40(C – G); NMSA Section 6-10-17; Section 6-10-31). NMCA will acquire all federal, state, and local tax and employer identification numbers in order to establish as a New Mexico public school as required by law.
- ***Banking Arrangements/Reconciliation:*** NMCA will maintain its accounts at a federally insured commercial bank or credit union. Funds will be deposited in non-speculative accounts including federally-insured savings or checking accounts or invested in non-speculative federally-backed instruments. For all funds, the Board must appoint and approve all individuals authorized to sign checks in accordance with these policies. All bank accounts will require multiple signatures on checks or other forms of disbursement. Bank statements from private banking institutions will be sent directly to the school's finance committee, who will submit a copy to the Licensed Business Official for reconciliation. This reconciliation will be provided to the committee for review on a monthly basis.
- ***Policies and Procedures:*** Policies and procedures to safeguard payroll and employee information will be implemented by the NMCA Governing Board. Policies and procedures will also be created in compliance with 6.20.2.18 NMAC.

3. Identify the plan for placing adequate personnel in place to perform financial tasks that is supported by the school's organizational structure and budget. Include job qualifications and responsibilities.

The Governing Board is confident that there will be excellent accounting support services provided to the Licensed Business Official, the Governing Board, and its finance and audit committees, including adequate personnel to perform financial tasks when the services described in the Statement of Work Agreement with Connections are included. The services that Connections will provide are similar to those often provided by an independent accounting firm that supports charter schools or other small businesses. Working under the direction of the Governing Board, the Licensed Business Official will be responsible for the execution of school's business, financial, and compliance functions and will be the primary interface and support for the Finance Committee. It is anticipated that this person will have five years of relevant work experience, the Licensed Business Official certification, operational or logistics experience and/or administrative or management experience, and a relevant advanced degree.

4. Provide a description of how the governing body will provide the proper legal fiscal oversight to ensure compliance and financial stability. Demonstrate a commitment to maintaining the financial viability of the school.

Financial Reporting - Internal: Each month, the NMCA Licensed Business Official will prepare for the Governing Board a set of detailed financial statements that will include a revenue and expense statement, a balance sheet, invoice detail (vendor, amount, date, purpose), any grant fund expenditures, cash receipts from all sources, and a transaction listing of all activity in the school's bank account. Additionally, the finance committee will receive supporting documentation for all invoices. In addition to showing the actual monthly and year-to-date results for the school, the Licensed Business Official will prepare a monthly projection for the balance of the school year in order to provide the Governing Board with visibility to the projected financial position of the school at the end of the fiscal year. This report will be reviewed at each Board meeting to ensure that the school has sufficient funds to meet all of its obligations and to stay on a sound financial footing. Potential shortfalls will be identified with sufficient time to make adjustments in the school's operations to ensure that a sufficient fund balance is always available at the end of each school year.

The Governing Board will use its sound budgeting and forecasting policy and procedures to monitor revenue and authorize expenditures according to any restrictions placed on such revenue. A detailed revenue and expense statement will be reviewed at each Board meeting and will serve as the vehicle to authorize future expenditures, along with the adopted budget and other Governing Board policies. This monthly reporting approach had two advantages for NMCA:

Limits on appropriations: By implementing the rigorous monthly reforecasting process, the Governing Board will be in a position to review and investigate projected expenditures against budgeted expenditures and make necessary adjustments, as appropriate. These adjustments may be an authorization to increase allowed spending, to reallocate funds from one account to another, or to direct the school to implement steps to reduce future spending.

Appropriations in excess of estimated revenue: As a result of NMCA's monthly reforecast activity, it is anticipated that any spending in excess of estimated revenue will be identified early and addressed in the normal course of operations (reducing planned future spending, pursuing new sources of revenue). The school will also strive to maintain a contingency fund at a level that will permit it to absorb modest operating loss in a specific year in the event of unforeseen state budgets or declining enrollment. Finally, the school will implement a policy of carefully hiring staff only as enrollment, and its corresponding revenue, permit, thus minimizing the possibility of this situation from occurring. Given the procedures outlined above, this situation is not expected to occur.

Financial Reporting - External: NMCA will provide the Department of Education staff, student and financial information that the Department requests, including information required for the Student Teacher Accountability Report System (STARS). NMCA will conform to all requirements for its annual reporting including the uniform chart of accounts and final cash report to the School Budget & Finance Analysis Bureau and other required financial reports. The information will be provided according to the time schedule and in the forms required by the Department.

Annual Independent Audit: NMCA will be audited annually by a New Mexico licensed, independent certified public accounting firm selected by the NMPED according to the same guidelines applicable to public and/or charter schools in New Mexico..

5. Describe the school’s strategic vision (long-range planning) for the sustainability of the school. Discuss the plans for addressing enrollment that does not meet the projections stated in your application.

The enrollment projections are conservative based upon the demand in New Mexico for full time virtual education and the experience that schools have had in other states that implemented plans similar to the one outlined in our application. In the event that the school did not make its enrollment numbers, the school will implement a policy of carefully hiring staff only as enrollment occurs. This prevents a large deficit from occurring. The nature of virtual education is the ability to react quickly and the ability to attract high-quality staff from a statewide pool if necessary. This increases the flexibility of the school and the ability to make wise financial decisions while ensuring students’ academic needs are successfully met.

The school also anticipates contracting for services from Connections generally on a per student basis, so as to make as many expenses of the school variable instead of fixed. This will ensure the majority of expenses will flex up and down with enrollment, thus cushioning the impact of an enrollment shortfall.

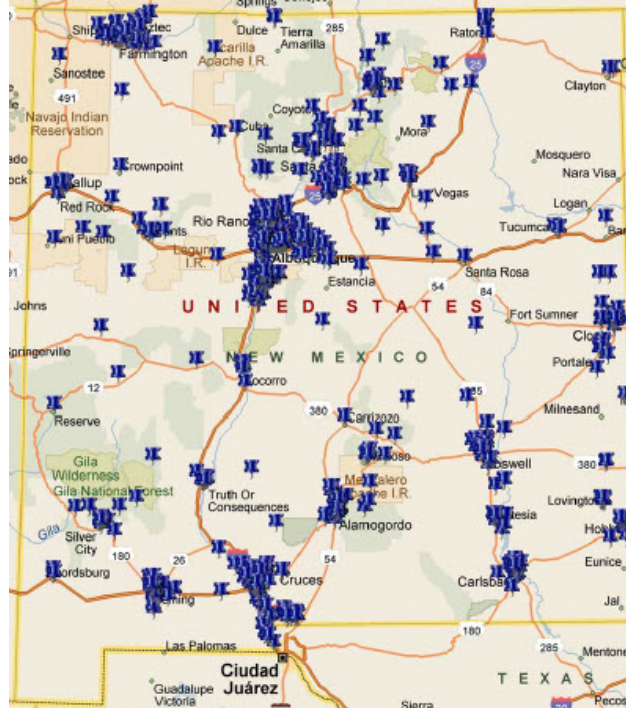
Another sound governance practice will be to build a reserve fund in those years where extra funding is identified or enrollment exceeds expectations. In this manner, the school will build a “rainy day” fund that will be available when unexpected expenses are incurred or revenue shortfalls occur.

The strategic vision of the school is to fill a unique void that currently exists in New Mexico and serve a population of students that needs full time virtual education. NMCA plans to be the “best in breed” by offering and contracting for certain products and services from an organization with over 10 years experience in full time virtual education. Another benefit of working with Connections will be NMCA’s ability to learn and collaborate from other Connections affiliated schools, especially those with a long-term relationship with Connections (some that stretch back over ten years). By contracting with an experienced organization who has demonstrated success with school districts and state agencies around the country, the Governing Board is confident that it will benefit New Mexico students for the immediate and long term future.

V. Evidence of Support

A. Describe the type of outreach the applicant conducted to make students and families aware of the proposed charter school and give evidence of the support you received in response.

Over the last three years, there have been over 3200 unsolicited information requests for a Connections Academy school in New Mexico. The following is a map of New Mexico documenting the locations of the information requests over the last 3 years. As evidenced by the map, interest in New Mexico Connections Academy is statewide including urban and rural communities.



The Founding Board took notice of the interest in virtual schooling expressed by families throughout New Mexico and ensured that prospective families had updates and the opportunity to attend information sessions. The purpose of the information sessions was to provide more detailed information about the proposed school, how online education works, and to help parents determine if this is right for their child. Three information sessions were held in Albuquerque, Santa Fe, and Las Cruces and 6 online information sessions were held during the Spring of 2012 in order to reach the remote areas of the state. Several emails and messages via social networking were received from interested families stating their interest in a Connections Academy virtual public charter school. Compiling all these sources of data, there are 640 families or 987 students throughout New Mexico who have stated their interest including grade level and geographic location (See Section V. B.).

There are many reasons why families are looking for options, as highlighted below, and why this is a good fit for New Mexico. Virtual education can serve many students who are not being served or are being underserved by their current school.

Truancy and at-risk students

An information session was held in Las Cruces in which a high school student brought his mother to learn about NMCA. John* (name changed) is a sophomore in high school with high state test scores but hated school, missed 84 days, and was in danger of being a drop-out. His parents were struggling on how to engage him in school and challenged him to find a school that would meet his need. John took the initiative to research educational options, and informed his parents of the information session. The National Center for School Engagement (2006)²⁹ states that truancy is correlated with poor performance on standardized tests, high school

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<http://www.schoolengagement.org/TruancyPreventionRegistry/Admin/Resources/Resources/AssessingthePrevalenceofTruancyAFourPiecePuzzle.pdf>

dropout, juvenile delinquency, substance abuse and eventually adult criminal behavior. The truancy rate according to the New Mexico Public Education Department is 16.7% and the high school truancy rate is 26%³⁰. John is a habitual truant and needs another option to help him be successful in school. Intervention is key and providing a virtual school option may help many students in New Mexico who are not engaged in school as evidenced by the truancy rate.

Another at-risk population that can be served by virtual education is teen parents. According to the 2010 report by the Guttmacher Institute³¹, New Mexico has the highest teen pregnancy rate in the nation – 93 teens out of 1000. In addition, 79% of teen parents in New Mexico are Hispanic and teen pregnancy rate among Native Americans is significantly higher than the national average³². Virtual education can serve these students by increasing the opportunities for teen parents to attend school while juggling the demands of parenthood. Online education through NMCA will be an academically, enriching program but provide the flexibility needed to meet academic goals not bound by place and time.

Home-schooled families who need a teacher

Currently there are 9057 students in New Mexico who are homeschooled according to the Options for Parents Division at the New Mexico Public Education Department. Many families who homeschool attended information sessions for NMCA because they recognize the limitations of their own expertise and they value highly qualified, skilled teachers. These parents have chosen homeschooling for various reasons including bullying, academic challenges, religious and special needs. They value public education but have challenges with sending their child to a traditional classroom setting. Several parents commented that they are excited about the certified teachers who will individualize instruction for their students and the opportunity to send their child to a school with high-quality curriculum. One New Mexico parent who homeschools four children explained she likes being more involved in their education but having a certified New Mexico teacher providing the guidance, teaching, lessons and curriculum is what is necessary for her children to be successful. It is important to note that the homeschooling association, Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA), differentiates virtual education and homeschooling and states

“HSLDA believes that a distinction between virtual charter schools and homeschooling is vital. While charter schools provide parents with another choice, we emphasize that they are still public schools in every sense of the word....children who are enrolled in virtual charter schools must follow all of the program’s policies and procedures”³³.

NMCA will meet Common Core and New Mexico state standards, follow all applicable statutes, and meet state testing requirements. Many families are aligned with these requirements and are excited about a school that offers teacher-led instruction but retains the flexibility that they require for their families needs.

Bullied Students

Many students seek virtual education because of bullying and student safety. The following was received by a grandparent who needs options for his grandson:

“Jeremy was in school and started complaining of stomach aches every morning, came to find out he was being bullied. We reported it to school personnel. NOTHING was ever done, finally Jeremy had missed so much school now its been about 1 to 2 years out of school, this started when Jeremy was in the 6th and 7th grade Jeremy is such a good polite person he needs a chance to do something with his life. Jeremy’s mother is a single parent and has 2 other boys and has been very sick.”-----GRANDPA*

New Mexico statute requires every school to develop an anti-bullying policy and will now hold schools accountable but parents and students need other options especially in rural communities. Senator Garcia, in introducing SB78, stated, *“Some of these cases become so serious that they lead to suicide. I hate to see a kid take his own life.”* (http://www.elpasotimes.com/news/ci_17314781) NMCA wants to provide a safety net for the Jeremy’s and other families who are the victims of bullying yet still are entitled to a public school education.

³⁰ <http://www.ped.state.nm.us/IT/schoolFactSheets.html>

³¹ [U.S. Teenage Pregnancies, Births and Abortions: National and State Trends and Trends by Race and Ethnicity](http://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/USTPtrends.pdf)
<http://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/USTPtrends.pdf>

³² http://www.thenationalcampaign.org/resources/pdf/NA_2007.pdf

³³ <http://www.hsllda.org/docs/nche/issues/c/charterschools.asp>

Special Needs, 504, and Medical

Many families are also looking for options due to medical or special needs. Children with Asperger's and Autism also find success learning online³⁴. One New Mexico parent posted on Facebook the following:

"My 13-year-old son has Asperger's Syndrome (high functioning Autism) and would really benefit from this program. I have looked at online education for him many times but without this program in NM, I couldn't afford a private online school for him. PLEASE bring this program to NM!"

Other disabilities can also benefit from online learning. A parent from Albuquerque withdrew her daughter in third grade from public school stating that *"she is hard of hearing and as a result the loud classrooms did not foster her learning. Often times the classrooms were too loud and full of distractions making following what the teacher was saying extremely difficult."* Another parent from Albuquerque stated that her son had difficulty after a series of knee surgeries and that *"he became hopeless in terms of school and wanted nothing to do with tackling the campus....To add to this, the time he missed during his surgery and recovery made it almost impossible to catch up"*. Virtual learning allows these New Mexico students an opportunity to be successful. It becomes another option in a unique learning environment that can eliminate the physical barriers that prevent students from learning and that identify them as special needs. Many students relish the opportunity to not let their disability define them and be able to learn in an environment that best meets their needs.

Elite Athletes, Aspiring Actors, and Artistic Prodigies

Many students require full time virtual education because they are involved in the sports, the arts, and are exceptionally talented. Due to the intensive nature of practices, competitions, events, or filming schedules, these students are unable to attend a school in a physical location. In fact, these students can prove to be challenging and costly for the neighborhood school because it is necessary to create individualized learning plans, special assignments, and additional resources in order to support students who miss a significant portion of instructional days. One parent from Albuquerque stated that virtual education provides the flexibility to support their family goals in athletics but that athletics provides an opportunity for future success:

"Athletic scholarships have been a great motivator in our home, especially since we couldn't afford to send them to college without one. Virtual education provides the flexibility, mobility and individualization a serious athlete needs to train and compete at an elite level. It may seem taboo to put a huge emphasis on sports but I can tell you from experience that when combined with high academic standards, accomplished athletes have a far better chance of getting into a great university and succeeding than your average student. Admission is only the beginning – priority enrollment in the classes they need, 1 on 1 tutoring, and an accountability structure are all added benefits of an athletic scholarship. The opportunity virtual education provides an athlete to study, train, travel and rest on their schedule can set the trajectory for their future success in life."

Athletes are not the only ones who experience success in meeting their goals but students active in the arts or theater also benefit from a flexible environment with access to quality curriculum and engaging teachers.

Gifted and Talented

Many students who are gifted and talented are unchallenged in their traditional classroom due to the lack of resources available and ability to differentiate instruction to meet their needs. Students especially in rural communities are also limited by class availability and highly-qualified teachers especially in the STEM areas. According to New Mexico Project 2012 that focuses on math and science education, there are only 26 new math and science teachers that are produced each year.³⁵ Students who are gifted and talented especially in math and science may find access to highly qualified math and science teachers difficult. Online education is an opportunity to leverage highly qualified faculty statewide. One NM secondary math teacher communicated to the NMCA Founding Board that in her experience:

"...approaching education in new, innovative ways is crucial for student's overall academic success especially working with students who show talent in STEM based subject matter. Online curriculum delivery provides students the opportunity to work at their own pace, 24/7 access and allows for one on one time with instructors. One on one instruction provides students with immediate support in more

³⁴ <http://www.myaspergerschild.com/2011/06/aspergers-students-and-virtual-school.html>

³⁵ http://www.sfafs.org/nmproject2012_documentation.asp

specific areas they may be struggling in without slowing down their pace or the pace of other students, allowing the subject matter discussion to go beyond the material being presented. Approaching education on an individual basis allows for the students to explore and develop their independent strengths and interests with virtual education being a tremendous tool for STEM based, accelerated learning.”

Continuity of Learning and Economic Development

Communities in the states surrounding New Mexico have authorized Connections affiliated schools and families have consistently been satisfied with the program. Connections families from contiguous states such as Texas, Colorado, Utah, Oklahoma, and Arizona have moved to New Mexico and are looking for educational options for their children. One family posted on facebook the following:

“...my son attended ColoCA (Colorado Connections Academy) before moving here and my daughter hates her new middle school and is very unhappy. We are considering allowing her to go back to CO to live with grandma if this isn't an option next school year.”

A divorced mother of a high school student shared that she wants to send her son to his dad's in Texas so he can participate in the Texas Connections Academy. The mobility of families makes the continuity of learning an economic imperative as families examine the educational opportunities available in a state before relocation. Another reason why students may need a public virtual education is access and equity. For example, two families in New Mexico are currently enrolled in a Connections private school option called National Connections Academy and expressed interest in a public virtual school option. Unfortunately several families cannot afford a private school option and stated, *“All the online options currently available to my family are too expensive, so New Mexico Connections Academy would be a dream come true.”*

B. Provide the total number of students interested in the charter by grade level. Do NOT provide names or specific letters of interest from families or students. If appropriate to demonstrate that the interested students meet the demographics of the students you are hoping to serve by the proposed school, disaggregate the number of prospective students by zip code, school of attendance (current), gender or type of current school (home, private, public), or other pertinent data.

The Founding Board is interested in creating NMCA to help students and families throughout New Mexico who need educational options. As described above, families have shared their story of why online learning is the best option for them. It can be challenging for traditional public schools to serve this unique population because of the diverse reasons why families need online learning. Individually, the numbers are small in a particular school district but in aggregate the families who need this option is a number that can support statewide virtual school options. According to *“Keeping Pace with K-12 Online Learning”* (2011)³⁶, the percent of state students in full time online schools range from .05% in Indiana and Massachusetts to 3.89% in Arizona (Arizona also includes students enrolled in supplemental online courses.) Idaho is in a distant second with 1.92% of the total K-12 population enrolled in full time virtual charter schools. Idaho has had virtual charters since 2002 and currently there are 8 full time charter options including a Connections affiliated school. The NMCA Founding Board recognizes that in New Mexico there is a percentage similar to the 1.92% Idaho sees of students who need a full time virtual charter option. There are 335,922 total K-12 students in New Mexico in 2012-2013. Of that enrollment, NMCA estimates 6449 students need full time virtual education which is less than 2% of the total student population. Many fear that virtual education will grow too fast or hurt rural communities. The facts as evidenced by the Keeping Pace report and other statistics show that this does not occur. Virtual charter schools provide the state and districts the ability to reach students through virtual education that were not being served and focus on a delivery model that is individualized, highly interactive, and engaging for students.

The following demographics by grade level are the total number of children by city and zip code who have indicated interest in the charter school. As outlined earlier, families need online learning for many reasons: medical, special needs, bullied, gifted/talented, sports, at-risk, and other family needs.

³⁶ <http://kpk12.com/>

City	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	TOTAL
Abiquiu	1			1										2
Alamogordo	1			1	1	1				2	2	1	1	10
Albuquerque	15	15	7	10	13	12	14	21	16	23	31	27	15	219
Algodones								1						1
Alto			1				1		1					3
Angel Fire		1	1				1							3
Anthony	1					1								2
Arenas Valley	1													1
Artesia				1	2			3	2	1	4	1	1	15
Aztec	1	1	2				1	3	2		4	1	2	17
Belen	3	2	1	1	3	2	3	2		2	3	4		26
Bernalillo	2					1					1	1		5
Bingham						1				1				2
Bloomfield	1	1	1	1	2	1	4	3	1		2	1		18
Bluewater							1				1			2
Bosque											1			1
Carlsbad	1	3	2		1		4		1	1	1	5	2	21
Cedar Crest		1					1			1				3
Chacon		1		1										2
Chama		1			1	1								3
Chaparral	1	2	1	2		1			1	1	2	2	1	14
Chimayo	1	1		1		1								4
Cimarron						1								1
Clovis	1	2		1		1	1	1	2	1	3	1	2	16
Crownpoint										2				2
Cuba					1			1		1	1	1		5
Cubero											1			1
Datil													1	1
Deming			1		1			1	2		1		2	8
Des Moines							1							1
Dexter	1		1		1			2						5
Dona Ana								1						1
Eagle Nest						1								1
Edgewood									1	1	1	1		4
El Prado		1				1		1		1				4
Ensenada										1				1
Espanola	1				1			1	2	4	1			10
Farmington	4	1		3	5	1		3	6	2	5	4	3	37
Flora Vista	2	1	1	1	1	1								7
Fort Sumner			1	1	1			1						4
Fruitland				1	1									2
Gallup							1			5	2		1	9
Grants	1	1				1								3

City	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	TOTAL
Hagerman					1					1	1			3
Hatch											2	1		3
Hobbs	2	1	2	1	3	1	3		1	5	2	7	4	32
Holloman AFB	1		1	1						2	1			6
Hope							1							1
Jamestown		1												1
Kirtland	1	1		3										5
La Luz			1		1									2
La Mesa			1											1
Laguna	1				1									2
Las Cruces	4	3	6	6	4	2	3	4	6	4	5	6	6	59
Las Vegas	1		2							1	1			5
Lemitar				1	1									2
Lincoln				1										1
Llano								1						1
Lordsburg											1			1
Los Alamos				1		1				1		1		4
Los Lunas	3	3	4	2			2	4	2	3	1			24
Loving		1												1
Lovington		2					1			2		1	1	7
Maxwell		1		1										2
Mescalero									1					1
Milan									1					1
Monument										1				1
Moriarty	2		1	2	2		1	1	2	1		1		13
Newcomb										1				1
Ohkay Owingeh	1	1	1	1					1	1				6
Organ								1						1
Pecos									1	1	1	1	1	5
Peralta			1	1		1		1						4
Pinehill	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	13
Ponderosa										1				1
Portales			1	2		3			4		2	1	2	15
Prewitt												1		1
Ramah				1	1	1								3
Ranchos de Taos						1	1							2
Raton				2		1	1							4
Ribera	1		1											2
Rincon												1	1	2
Rio Rancho	4	2	3	4	1	4	7	5	3	6	6	7	2	54
Roswell	3	3	1	4	2	2	1	2	4	7	4	5	2	40
Ruidoso					1		1	1	1	2	1	2	1	10
Ruidoso Downs			1			1			2					4

City	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	TOTAL
San Antonio					1					1				2
San Fidel									1					1
San Lorenzo				1		1								2
San Rafael										1				1
Sandia Park	1							1			1			3
Santa Clara							1							1
Santa Cruz							1		1					2
Santa Fe	4	5	3		4	5	5	3	1	2	3	3	1	39
Santa Teresa									1					1
Sheep Springs										1				1
Shiprock	1	1	2	1	1	2	1	1	2	3	2	1	1	19
Silver City	3						1		2		1	1	1	8
Socorro				1						1			1	3
Taos	1	1						2			1			5
Tatum					1									1
Thoreau									1	1				2
Tierra Amarilla						1								1
Tijeras										1	2			3
Tohatchi					1				1		1			3
Tome						1	1							2
Truth/Consequences	1							1			1			3
Tucumcari					1	1		2	1	1		1		7
Tularosa				1			1							2
Tyrone		1	1							1		1		4
Valdez				1										1
Wagon Mound	1													1
Waterflow												1		1
White Sands Missile			1	1										2
Williamsburg								1			1		1	3
Yahtahey										1				1
Yeso			1			1								2
Youngsville		1			1									2
Zuni			1		1									2
Grand Total	76	64	57	67	65	60	67	77	78	105	109	94	57	975

C. Explain the founder's ties to and knowledge of the community the school is intended to serve.

The Founding Board of New Mexico Connections Academy was drawn to serve on the board for various and diverse reasons but all share a desire for the best possible learning experience for all students in New Mexico.

Governor Terry Aguilar is Governor of the San Ill Defonso Pueblo and is a leader in his community. He joined the Founding Board because he knows that many students are struggling and need additional educational options. Students in his tribe drop-out due to teen pregnancy, experience bullying, and are at-risk due to a variety of factors. He believes that virtual education through NMCA could be another option for these students. In addition to serving as Governor of the Pueblo, Governor Aguilar also serves as lawyer. His legal background will provide a unique viewpoint that will help implement the vision and mission of the school.

Senator Mark Boitano joined the Founding Board because of his long history in supporting options and school choice in New Mexico including virtual education and currently serves as the Board Chairman. Senator Boitano believes that technology can truly transform and individualize instruction as technology is revolutionizing health care. By providing options, Senator Boitano believes all schools will improve increasing New Mexico's academic performance and graduation success statewide. His knowledge and expertise of real estate, school facilities, charter school law, education policy, and business are all assets to the Founding Board of NMCA. He is a voice for disenfranchised students and families who seek additional learning options.

Patrick Chavez is a civil engineer and joined the Founding Board for two reasons: additional options as a parent and to increase STEM options for all students in New Mexico. Mr. Chavez knows the importance of education in achieving your goals and is proud to be the first member of his family on his father's side to graduate from college. Growing up in Los Alamos, he knows that even in a high performing district, it can be easy to "fall through the cracks". As a professional in the STEM field, he knows the importance of education and the difficulty in finding trained professionals in engineering. He believes that an option such as NMCA with a focus on STEM will help inspire more students to enter into the STEM fields and help New Mexico be a leader in the STEM industries.

Yvonne Duhigg is a parent of a second-grader and currently homeschools her son. She believes that parents need choices in education including virtual education and is interested in enrolling her son in NMCA because of the highly qualified teachers and proven curriculum. She will provide a great voice on the board for families enrolled in the program and will help provide guidance ensuring that the board meets the goals of the charter.

Paul Gessing hosted a forum on virtual education in July 2011 recognizing the value and opportunity in providing full time virtual school options. He is knowledgeable about the opportunities that virtual education provides in other states and believes that New Mexico families would benefit from this public school option. As a parent, he also understands the importance of education and how education can benefit the community.

Dr. Patrick Lopez is the Executive Director of Explora, a hands-on Science Museum. Dr. Lopez is a long time New Mexico educator and school administrator experienced in working with diverse groups and their educational needs. He is passionate about STEM education and believes that reaching more youth throughout New Mexico will help prepare students for the 21st century. He also believes that equity and access are critical components of delivering STEM education throughout rural New Mexico increasing post-secondary success.

Carlo Lucero is a leader in the Hispanic community and serves on the Hispano Chamber of Commerce. Mr. Lucero is well versed on the importance of education in a quality workforce and is interested in additional educational options to assist minority students in their educational goals. He serves on the Business Roundtable for Albuquerque Public School District. Knowledgeable about public school education and its impact on the business and Hispanic communities, Mr. Lucero's extensive experience in leadership, business, and board governance will be an asset to the Founding Board.

The board has a diverse skill set including a lawyer, legislator, medical professional, parent, educator, and engineer representing varied interests from the Hispanic, Native American, homeschooling, traditional education, and STEM communities. All value education as evident by the diverse degrees and skill set. Most importantly, they are current or former parents who know the importance of education and school-choice options.

D. Explain any partnerships, networking relationships, and/or any resources or agreements that are planned with these persons or entities.

There are several letters of support included in Section M from community leaders, STEM professionals, parent organizations, business organizations, and educators.

It is important to draw attention to the partnership with Explora, a hands-on innovative discovery learning center. The mission of Explora is to create opportunities for lifelong learning through interactive experiences in science, technology and art. They believe that learning can happen anywhere and are supportive of efforts to help students learn about STEM in innovative ways. It is the intent of the board to partner with Explora's

mobile science lab to provide statewide field trips to communities throughout New Mexico. Field trips are an important component of the Connections model. NMCA intends a school-within-a-school model with a focus on STEM. Partnering with Explora's mobile lab will enhance the ability of the school to offer additional opportunities throughout New Mexico with an experienced partner. The budget reflects this partnership under Virtual Education and STEM services.

E. If there are other public schools in the geographic area within which you are seeking to locate, describe why your proposed school is a needed option for the students served by the existing school(s).

As stated earlier, many students are not being served or are underserved by their current school. Students whose instructional needs will be effectively met by the NMCA virtual charter school model include:

- Children who are in rural communities and lack access to public school options.
- Children who are far ahead of or far behind their peers in school, including students at risk of academic failure and those coping with social issues who may particularly benefit from personalized instruction.
- Young people pursuing artistic or athletic careers or career development opportunities that require a flexible schedule.
- Children who are homebound due to illness or disability.
- Children who are homeless.
- Students with special learning needs. NMCA intends to fully serve special education students, expected to make up at least 12% of the NMCA student body based on other Connections affiliated schools' experience and the overall percentage of New Mexico students with special needs.

Other online learning options are available but they are not the same as our proposed charter school for several reasons.

- **District Supplemental Online Learning Options:** Some districts in New Mexico are providing virtual school options but they are mainly at the high school level and are supplemental in design. Many partner with IDEAL-NM, the state virtual school. It is also important to note that IDEAL-NM which is a great option for supplemental course options is not a full time virtual charter school. It is a virtual school supplementing face-to-face schools by providing 1 or 2 online courses at the high school level. It does not provide elementary grades or a full school experience including field trips, clubs, state testing, guidance counseling or special education services.
- **District Full Time Online Learning Options:** Some districts offer their own virtual programs, such as Albuquerque, but they can be resource intensive and difficult to implement for many smaller school districts because of the level of expertise needed and the small number of students to be served in a particular locale. Our school is unique in that it will exclusively provide virtual education and the faculty will become experts in serving students in this format. Just like specialization occurs in other areas, NMCA will be specialized in online education by leveraging its partner's 10 year expertise. NMCA teachers will be experts in online pedagogy, passionate about delivery, skilled in the technology, and excited to individualize instruction to students throughout New Mexico.
- **Charter Blended Learning:** There are several schools that use blended learning but it is important to differentiate that it is not a full time virtual learning option. The students that we seek to serve are students, for whatever reason, cannot attend a face-to-face school and a blended option does not work for them. In addition, the majority of blended learning schools are in urban areas due to the number of students required to offer an effective school leaving rural students with few options.
- **Virtual Charter School:** Farmington Public School District will open a virtual charter in Fall 2012 partnering with K12 Inc. This school will be a full time virtual school. Our proposed school is different for many reasons. Parents and families need other options, even within full time virtual charter schools. Differences between schools include curriculum, teacher preparation, field trip options, school support services, special education delivery and overall culture of the school. An important reason why NMCA will be different from the Farmington charter is that NMCA will focus on STEM. It is important to provide families with additional choices in virtual charter schools

as well as an opportunity to participate in an intensive STEM focus regardless of geographic location.

F. Provide letters of support from community leaders, business people or elected officials. (If additional space is needed, submit a separate document as a supplement to the Appendices.)

Letters of support are included in Appendix M from the Chamber of Commerce of Santa Fe, United Way of Santa Fe County, the Hispano Chamber of Commerce, Educate New Mexico, the University of New Mexico's Mind Research Network, White/Luff Financial of Santa Fe, Explora, New Mexico Families for Public School Options, Sandia Science and Technology Park Development Corporation, the Albuquerque Chamber of Commerce, a teacher, a real estate professional, and other community and business leaders who seek additional options in education.

New Mexico Connections Academy will be a high quality virtual charter school as demonstrated through the Education, Governance, and Budget Plans with demonstrated need and support throughout the state of New Mexico. The NMCA Founding Board is excited about the opportunity to help each K-12 student who needs an alternative to the traditional classroom maximize his or her potential and meet the highest performance standards through a unique individualized learning program, access to high quality NM-certified teachers, and high parental involvement.