

**New Century School  
Annual Report**

**1997-1998 School Year  
Submitted: July 1, 1998**

New Century School has successfully completed the third year of its five year charter contract. With growth deliberately slow this past year, NCS was able to focus on the five 1997-98 goals established by the Site Council. Because NCS operates without a traditional building administrative structure, parents and teachers develop and implement all decisions and policy processes of the school. Through parent workshops, surveys, "coffees," classroom voicemail and newsletters, e-mail, and, most importantly, informal discussions with parents, the staff ascertains the needs of the children and their families. This information is used in planning academic and social activities, developing community activities, and setting overall school goals. At the end of the academic year, current and new members of the Site Council and all NCS staff come together for a retreat to discuss the direction of the school and prioritize its goals for the upcoming year. Staff and parents on the Site Council review progress on these goals throughout the year.

### **Governance and Home-School Communication**

NCS operates administratively with relatively small overhead expenses. The day-to-day operation of the school is conducted by a coordinator and assistant coordinator, both of whom are parents. The assistant coordinator operates on district salary for half the school day as an administrative secretary. Both coordinator and assistant coordinator represent the school administratively for school and district business. They also work within the community on education awareness issues, enhance the direct home-to-school link for families and their children, field visitors to the school, locate staff and student program needs, and oversee the school's behavior and classroom management plan. Because New Century School has a small student population that requires direct contact and knowledge of all of our families, the coordinator and assistant coordinator are parents who work directly with the school's staff to implement and develop the charter mission. They receive a small stipend for their services.

Developing policy for the school is the responsibility of the Site Council and its sub-committees. The Site Council is comprised of parents across all the multi-age classroom levels, at least one teacher, and the coordinator and assistant coordinator. All teachers and staff are invited and encouraged to sit on the Site Council, but NCS recognizes the time constraints individuals face. Next year, four staff members will sit on Site Council. Including parents, the size of the Site Council has fluctuated over the past three years with membership anywhere from twelve (first year) to twenty (next year). The Site Council operates on a consensus decision-making style. Two year terms are the established norm, with a third year option available to parents who wish to stay on the council depending on the number of new parents interested in joining the Site Council. Parents new to the school, or previously not involved in the school are encouraged to sit on the Site Council. Next year, two members who have served the school well since its inception will step down to accommodate the interest from new parents joining our school.

The Site Council meets once a month during the school year, with more meetings scheduled if necessary. Budget, personnel, and fund-raising sub-committees conduct regular meetings

throughout the year reporting to the Site Council on business and recommendations for action each month. Ad hoc committees report as needed. Sub-committees are comprised of at least one teacher, one parent, and the coordinator or assistant coordinator. Members of the sub-committees generally sit on the Site Council as well, but are not required to do so. The teachers' curriculum committee (TCC) meets at least once a month and reports to the Site Council at every meeting. The TCC is comprised of all teaching staff and is responsible for curriculum development and implementation. As the Site Council examines various program needs throughout the year, teaching staff who do not attend regular Site Council meetings may be invited to discuss an agenda topic.

Parents on the Site Council undergo little training, with the exception of the end of year retreat and a beginning of year welcome meeting that reviews the format of the council and the basis for the consensus style decision-making body. A basic respect and appreciation for the work of trained professionals in education underlies the motivation of parents who participate in decision-making at school. The basic driving force behind committee work appears to be the promotion of the parent-teacher partnership by supporting quality curriculum and student success.

Teachers and staff at NCS participated in two workshops this past year designed to promote team work and identify areas of individual strengths to bring a team together. Using Goals 2000 monies, NCS contracted with Howick and Associates to conduct two three-hour workshops in December and January designed to promote teamwork. The first workshop focused on issues of trust, mutual goals, and strengths of individuals that complement a team. A follow-up session was conducted solely on the Myers-Briggs Model. A third meeting was held with NCS staff members only (no facilitator). At this meeting, staff adopted roles for carrying out the business of the school based on the information acquired in the first two workshops. Roles created as a direct result of these workshops are in the areas of curriculum, assessment, public relations, grant-writing, and social activities.

These roles are designed to redistribute the job duties of the Lead Teacher. Accountability and time issues mandated that shared job responsibilities be carried out in a structure that promoted team work. The Lead Teacher position as originally noted in the charter contract required a teacher to work heavily relaying information to the staff from the Site Council, gaining consensus from the staff, and presenting the staff's view at Site Council meetings. But the Lead Teacher also took on important roles in program development, assessment, and public relations and there was a sense among staff that this might be too demanding on a single teacher's time and resources. The new roles and governing element are designed to empower teachers to work together in decision making and bring a more cohesive position to the Site Council process. These workshops and their outcomes were well received by the staff of NCS and were directly responsible for increasing the number of staff sitting on Site Council.

The Site Council and teaching staff at NCS has appreciated and enjoyed the support of various resource personnel in the district. We have had visits to the Site Council from the Superintendent and to TCC meetings from the Director of Curriculum and Instruction. Next year, the Director of

Pupil Services will offer similar support by meeting with the staff on the issue of appropriate developmental progress of young children versus true educational exceptional needs.

As part of NCS's efforts to continue to promote home to school communication, several open house/workshop style meetings were held throughout the year. Families are welcomed to their school with a picnic and classroom welcome prior to school's opening. This picnic and the kindergarten orientation in the summer give students a chance to see and enjoy their classroom, meet their teacher, renew old friendships, establish new ones, and bring their supplies to class prior to the first day of school. They give staff an opportunity to meet new families, see returning families and their children, and distribute information necessary to kick off a new school year prior to the first day of school. Parents have an opportunity to meet each other, chat about the summer, discover similar professional interests or shared enthusiasms for hobbies. The fall picnic/open house is also an opportunity to review busing expectations and concerns, school behavior management expectations, and the underlying philosophy for the curriculum implementation. It is at this time the school's handbook on policy and procedure is distributed to families. The review of these necessary elements of running a school is conducted outside of individual classrooms and as a whole school, to emphasize NCS as a school community.

A fall workshop held after the start of the school year explains further the curriculum implementation and assessment measures. NCS, with its small size classrooms is designed to focus on the individual strengths and abilities of children and guide their progress at a rate that is conducive to instilling permanent learning patterns in them throughout their elementary education. Through this workshop, parents have an opportunity to discuss the structure of cooperative learning, theme-based units of instruction, and performance-based individual assessments. They also see the importance of their contribution to visiting the classroom and discussing with teachers their child's interests and struggles and how the school and home together can develop a child's natural thirst for knowledge into measurable, appropriate, and relevant skills.

In the spring, NCS holds two school meetings. A spring program features the students in music, dance, and acting. NCS also introduced this year a spring Open House to celebrate student achievement and welcome families to view the children's work. Throughout the course of the school year, the children welcomed families to school to participate in classroom plays, project presentations, and bazaars.

This year we introduced "Coffee with the Teacher" evening meetings. NCS's 4th/5th grade classroom teacher, responsible for curriculum issues, held two meetings in the spring on multiple intelligences and the philosophical underpinnings of "I Wonder" projects as a learning tool for young children. The meetings were well received and will be continued throughout all of next year on various topics of interest indicated by parents, primarily through the surveys. The purpose of these "coffees" is to engage parents in informal discussion around a particular topic of interest to educating their child at NCS. They are open to parents at all grade levels and bring people together to share ideas and establish friendships in the school community.

NCS has also continued to use technology to connect home and school. A state grant financed a second year of a two-way voice mail system that provided each NCS family with a free voice mail account. This system allowed teachers and administrative staff to broadcast messages to all parents or parents of particular classrooms, and parents could save or respond to these messages if they wished or send new messages to NCS. The school's website continues to develop and display school information and classroom work and receive e-mail from around the country. Visits to the site vary monthly. For example, in November the site received 64 visitors (not "hits"), but by May the number of visitors exceeded 200. This year we also received a federal grant to develop the home-school connection through a program that will greatly increase access to laptop computers for students at our 4-5 grade level. Plans for implementation of this program will be developed over the summer.

### **Curriculum and Assessment**

NCS's charter contract specifically details a philosophical approach to education that is cooperative in nature, individual in development, and community based. All NCS's curriculum themes during the course of the school year (six per year) are science-based and contain a whole-school component that brings the children together either as peers or mentors. The 1997-98 school year had a deliberate focus in three areas by staff: individual math assessments, development and use of a science lab with "I Wonder" as the tool for implementation, and diversity issues as part of curriculum instruction.

*Individual Math Assessments:* NCS hired a part-time learning resource coordinator to work with staff, students, and families on individual math assessments. She was instrumental in developing profiles of the younger children (K-1) directly into their assessment portfolios so that teachers at this level knew the precise starting point of the children's abilities and their comfortable, preferred method of developing math skills. She worked in small groups with the older children (grades 2-5), refining already existing individual math packets (Math At Your Own Pace) for the children to work on both in class and at home to build on the classroom teacher's introduction of skills. Children progress at different rates, with some advancing quickly beyond grade level and others needing more time. While a natural competitive element developed between the children on their rate of progress and achievement, student mentors were also encouraged to perfect their knowledge and help other children in difficult areas. The 2-5 teachers have purchased math programs that integrate the students own ability with accuracy in skills (STAR Program). The STAR program is a computer based program that allows the children to work on computers to complete their work, has some built-in correction/assessment components and allows the teachers to review individual and whole class progress without relying on handwritten notes and files.

*Development of Science Lab and "I Wonder":* All NCS classroom teachers participated in a summer workshop in Oshkosh prior to the school year and had an opportunity to meet with a science teacher consultant for a week to develop a science curriculum and lab. With the assistance of federal grant money, materials were purchased for a science laboratory, staff development time,

and an integration of science based elements into the curriculum. With NCS's reliance on science-based themes, the "I Wonder" inquiry-based model for instruction was a natural development of the workshop. Each year, one of the 6-week units of instruction is called "I Wonder" where the children develop a question of interest on their own with teacher and peer guidance. The peer teams were groups of approximately three children (one younger and two older) that developed a question of interest the younger child had composed. Students were assigned a classroom and the teacher from that classroom became responsible for assisting the students now in his or her classroom. This is but one way we build the concept of NCS as a community—the teachers working with all the students in the school and the children understanding that the teachers are there for all of them, not just some of them. This whole school unit culminates in a "Celebration of Learning" evening opened to the entire school's families. The "Celebration of Learning" evening was decided to be a more efficient and effective method of conveying student learning and achievement to parents and to share in all the students' success and hard work as a community. The children were able to shine and take enormous pride in their work and their school and parents had an opportunity to share with each other as they toured the school informally with students and teachers. With only four families not attending, and contact made by teachers to those four families, staff concluded this was a more effective method to convey and demonstrate student learning and achievement than an end of year individual conference. In our effort to accommodate individual needs as we build community, any family who wished an individual conference had the option to schedule one. Families appeared quite satisfied and the school will continue to use a "Celebration of Learning" as an effective means of communicating student learning to families.

In conjunction with the development of science as a basis for incorporating all other skills, NCS continues to enjoy a working relationship with Promega each spring. We are fortunate to have a parent who is on Promega's staff as a research scientist. This parent contributes a number of weeks each year working with the children in the classrooms to develop an experiment that culminates in a trip to Promega's laboratory. This year, for example, some of the children grew bacteria while others grew organisms that killed bacteria. NCS considers this and other field trips to be a valuable part of the curriculum.

*Diversity:* A third curricular focus this year was the structured introduction of diversity issues for all the children. While these issues have always been introduced in our small community, the introduction of regular classroom activities cemented the understanding that we need to work together and appreciate differences in each other and the community as a whole. The K-1 children learned about topics brain stormed by them and the teachers at monthly guidance sessions that were followed by a session two weeks later to discuss what they had practiced and had difficulty with between the first and second sessions. Topics ranged from how to treat other people to how to express feelings of emotion. The 2-5 children structured activities differently, with weekly activities that usually included a guest speaker. Topics for discussion or role-playing each Friday morning included such things as different family structures and lifestyles, physical and emotional handicaps, and different cultural experiences. Guest speakers ranged from tribal leaders to doctors to those involved in alternative lifestyles. NCS also had the opportunity to expose all the children

to a series of performances at the Madison Civic Center throughout the year. Some of these performances were dramatic plays, some were dance recitals, while others were musicals. The goal of New Century's diversity curriculum focus is to develop a tolerance and respect for each other, build an understanding of the complexities of working together in a bigger world community, and to assume responsibility for supporting all members of a community environment.

*Ongoing assessment procedures:* Assessment methods for demonstrating student learning continue to be focused in performance-based activities such as portfolios, individual student work packets (e.g., math packets), class presentations of projects that are video-taped and peer assessed, and cooperative group work and mentorships. All of the above are communicated to parents at least three times a year in conferences and more frequently through informal teacher-parent interaction, voice mail, newsletters, and parent invitations to the classroom to aid in projects and trips. The student assessment profile (report card) is a continuum of elementary level skills with a narrative-style report at the end. It is begun in the child's K-1 classroom and continued on through his or her 4-5 classroom. Through hands-on involvement and help, parents experience the implementation of the curriculum and understand the intended learning outcomes—a necessary element of a home-school partnership. This school year saw the formal introduction of the multiple intelligences as a tool for children to use in designing and conducting project work. The teachers used multiple intelligences as a way to guide children to complete work in more than one area and to incorporate areas of struggle into an area of strength. The children have their own charts listing the seven areas of intelligence for a project assignment. In some cases, the children are told to choose an assignment from certain areas of intelligence (i.e., write a script for a play, design a model for NASA to incorporate on the space shuttle, narrate a civil war battle scene) recognizing that they need to be directed to areas of weakness; in other cases, they can choose for themselves the areas with which to complete the project assignment. The multiple intelligences as a hands-on learning tool is used primarily in the grades 2-5 level, but will begin to be more formally implemented with the younger children as the staff continues to develop the curriculum.

By contract and law, NCS administers the state's third grade reading test and the state's fourth grade WSAS exam. We also voluntarily administer the second grade language arts and math CTB test. The children are encouraged to assume the responsibilities of completing one more task, as opposed to succumbing to the pressures of an all-or-nothing test performance. They did perform quite well on these tests and results were reported back to the individual parents of the children. Fourth grade children at New Century did very well on the WSAS exam, performing well within the district's expectation for results. The children consistently scored in the "Advanced" and "Proficient" categories for Reading, Language, Math, Science, and Social Studies; in four of the five tested subject areas, NCS had the highest percentage of students falling in these two categories. Third grade reading results will not be available until September of 1998, although NCS third grade children have consistently scored well on this exam and we have no reason to feel otherwise this year. Scores will be forwarded to NCS by the Director of Curriculum and Instruction when they are available, and NCS will immediately forward the results to the students' parents. The CTB Language Arts and Math exam was administered to second grade children.

NCS students did exceptionally well on this exam with an average language arts score of 86% (district average 82.4%) and an average math score of 98% (district average 88.5%).

NCS maintains a policy of reporting state mandated test scores to the district as required by law. However, any other testing administered to the children is recorded in the child's records and reported back to the parents. Other tests, such as retellings and dictated sentences, are used in various grade levels for individual student assessment purposes only. Those results are used by the teacher in identifying areas of concern and success and in discussions with parents to help identify these areas.

### **District-Program Cooperation**

As a result of the Board of Education's passage of the Choice Policy, NCS has submitted a copy of the working agreement effective next fall between Sugar Creek Elementary School and New Century School. NCS and Sugar Creek operate as different sites with different philosophies on education. However, the two schools have developed a cooperative relationship over the last three years. NCS is certain that as issues continue to arise the two schools will be able to agree on an appropriate course of action.

It has always been NCS's intent to work cooperatively within the district as a public charter school program. Because of its efforts to be cooperative and flexible, NCS went on record as opposing the district's need for a choice and charter policy. NCS maintains a contract with the Board of Education and maintains accountability through meetings with district administrators, appearances before the Board and an annual report to the Board. Our concern is that the policy contradicts the need for—or effectively overrides—any such contract with the Board of Education and violates the spirit of a charter program operating autonomously, but cooperatively, with the district administration. NCS will continue to work closely with the district's central office administration to ensure a heterogenous population and fair practices of education—this has never been a problem for NCS—while preserving the charter's original intent of allowing for differing educational practices to succeed for different children. The school's Site Council will examine any policy initiatives developed by the district, especially those designed to restrict or affect charter schools while imposing no obligations on non-charters. We will generate alternatives to those policies that are designed to restrict the program and hinder its development and autonomy unnecessarily.

The current charter and choice policy does, for example, apply only to charter programs at this time. NCS *does not have representation* on the administrative team of the district and is not part of those across-site discussions. We are the only district site that has not been given a seat at the table. This appears to be a penalty for not maintaining traditional administrators as part of the governing structure of the school. If the district insists on moving away from informal cooperation in favor of one-size-fits-all formal policies, then NCS believes it should also have formal representation on the districts administrative team. Too often we find we are reacting to decisions

reached without our formal input—no other site is put in this position.

### **Goals for 1998-99 School Year**

NCS holds a retreat each summer to evaluate current goals and establish new goals for the upcoming year. This retreat is attended by all NCS staff and all current and new Site Council members and is facilitated by an outside facilitator. A list of this year's goals is attached; the implementation and/or achievement of these goals has been discussed throughout this document. At the retreat, the consensus was that the goals had been properly implemented and, for the most part, achieved.

Four new goals have been established by the Site Council and staff of New Century as a direct result of this summer's retreat: 1) integrate the K-5 program; 2) define curriculum outcomes for math, science, foreign language, language arts and related arts; 3) engage parents in the learning process and support services; 4) develop a long-term governance plan. The protocol for implementation, assessment, and monitoring of these goals is under development.

### **Future Goals and Initiatives**

New Century School continues to develop a partnership between home and school so that all children are successful in learning. A small school environment, a *team* of dedicated teachers and volunteers, and a supportive family and community environment are necessary elements to achieve this mission. All our efforts—curriculum planning, student assessment, cooperative learning with mentors and peers, themes steeped in scientific principles, and utilization of the community as a classroom—are designed to instill in children a lifelong ability to acquire information and apply knowledge to achieve personal and professional goals for themselves and those around them.

NCS's population growth will level off in the next two years because we believe small school size is a critical part of identifying student needs and learning styles and forming a strong working partnership with families. Although NCS believes the new policy on registration and student enrollment may complicate a *successful* process that the school has refined over the last four years—NCS continues to be as diverse as the district—we believe we can maintain a healthy, heterogenous population that is both diverse and rich in its differences. Our program demands that we work with all children and families who enter our doors in a supportive manner. Our positive and cooperative negotiations with the district on budget, personnel, state standards, and good communication are designed to enable this program to thrive and benefit any and all public school students.

**New Century School  
Demographic Data**

1. School Year: 1997-1998

2. Enrollment of Students

Current Enrollment and grade breakdown (September breakdown):

Kindergarten	22
First Grade	22
Second Grade	5
Third Grade	12
Fourth Grade	8
Fifth Grade	6

Breakdown of enrollments by grade level and gender (number and percent):

Kindergarten	Boys: 10 (45.5%)	Girls: 12 (54.5%)
First Grade	Boys: 11 (50.0%)	Girls: 11 (50.0%)
Second Grade	Boys: 3 (60.0%)	Girls: 2 (40.0%)
Third Grade	Boys: 6 (50.0%)	Girls: 6 (50.0%)
Fourth Grade	Boys: 6 (75.0%)	Girls: 2 (25.0%)
Fifth Grade	Boys: 5 (83.3%)	Girls: 1 (16.7%)
Total Number	Boys: 41 (54.7%)	Girls: 34 (45.3%)

Enrollment by number/percentage based on ethnic background:

Black (not Hispanic):	1 (1.3%)
American Indian/Alaskan Native:	0 (0%)
White/Caucasian:	70 (93.3%)
Hispanic (Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, other):	2 (2.7%)
Asian or Pacific Islander (including India or subcontinent):	2 (2.7%)

3. Population trends for the site:

Last year's enrollment:	59
This year's enrollment:	75
Projected enrollment for next year:	90

