



PUBLIC SCHOOLS OF NORTH CAROLINA

STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION William C. Harrison, Ed.D., *Chairman*

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION June St. Clair Atkinson, Ed.D., *State Superintendent*

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Dear Letter of Intent submitter,

Public charter school applications to open in 2014 are due to the Office of Charter Schools no later than March 1, 2013 at **12 noon**. **NO** application will be accepted after that time.

Complete applications consist of one (1) single-sided, signed and notarized copy and one (1) CD or flash drive containing two (2) electronic documents, one (1) PDF of the narrative and one (1) PDF of the full appendices. See the application instructions to ensure you follow ALL requirements.

Application copies can be delivered in one of three ways.

1. **Hand delivered** before February 28th, 2013 5:00 P.M.
NCDPI building: Office of Charter Schools (2nd Floor North Side)
301 North Wilmington Street, Raleigh, NC
2. **Hand delivered** on March 1, 2013 by 12 Noon
NCDPI building: Room 150
301 North Wilmington Street, Raleigh, NC
3. **Mail Service** by March 1, 2013 12 Noon
The Office of Charter Schools
6303 Mail Service Center
Raleigh, NC 27699-6303

***All mail service packages must be received by NCDPI Mail Service no later than 12 noon on March 1, 2013**

The content of the Letter of Intent is NOT binding, however a submitted Letter of Intent must be on file for you to submit an application. When you submit your application you will be asked to provide information regarding your submitted Letter of Intent for purpose of verification.

We anticipate a large volume of applications being submitted; to further assist the OCS staff include this letter in your submitted application as the cover page. Please complete the following information as it reads on the Letter of Intent.

Letter of Intent Information:

Lead applicant North Carolina for Quality Virtual Education, Inc. - Bryan Setser, Board President

Proposed name of the charter school North Carolina Connections Academy

County of proposed location Statewide

If you have any questions please contact Tom Miller in the Office of Charter Schools at 919-807-3492.

OFFICE OF CHARTER SCHOOLS

Joel E. Medley, Ph.D., *Director* | joel.medley@dpi.nc.gov

6303 Mail Service Center, Raleigh, North Carolina 27699-6303 | (919) 807-3491 | Fax (919) 807-3496

AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY/AFFIRMATIVE ACTION EMPLOYER



NORTH CAROLINA FOR QUALITY VIRTUAL EDUCATION, INC.

D.B.A.

NORTH CAROLINA CONNECTIONS ACADEMY

CHARTER APPLICATION

**Submitted to
North Carolina Department of Public Instruction
Office of Charter Schools**

**By
Bryan Setser, Board President
Phone: (919) 638-7056
Email: bryan@2revolutions.net**



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I. Application Cover Pages

Name of proposed charter school: North Carolina Connections Academy

Has the organization applied for 501(c)(3) non-profit status? Yes No

Name of non-profit organization under which charter will be organized or operated:

North Carolina for Quality Virtual Education, Inc. d.b.a. North Carolina Connections Academy

Provide the name of the person who will serve as the **primary contact** for this Application. The **primary contact** should serve as the contact for the follow-up, interviews, and notices regarding this Application.

Name of contact person: Bryan Setser

Title/Relationship to nonprofit: Board President

Mailing address: 4 San Marcos Avenue, Durham, NC 27703

Primary telephone: (919) 638-7056 **Alternate telephone:**

E-mail address: bryan@2revolutions.net

Name of county and Local Education Agency (LEA) in which charter school will reside:

County: Statewide – All counties

LEA: North Carolina Department of Public Instruction Office of Charter Schools

What is the name of the nonprofit organization that governs this charter school?

North Carolina for Quality Virtual Education, Inc. d.b.a. North Carolina Connections Academy

Grade Levels Served and Total Student Enrollment

Projected school opening: August Month 2014 Year

Will this school operate on a year-round schedule? Yes No

Proposed Grade Levels Served and Total Student Enrollment (3 Years)

Academic School Year	Grade Levels	Total Projected Student Enrollment
First Year	6-12	1,000
Second Year	6-12	1,500
Third Year	6-12	2,500

The State Board of Education provides funds to charter schools, approves the original members of the boards of directors of the charter schools, has the authority to grant, supervise, and revoke charters, and demands full accountability from charter schools for school finances and student performance.

I certify that I have the authority to submit this application and that the founding board members and I were regularly involved in the development of this application. All information contained herein is complete and accurate. I realize that any misrepresentation could result in disqualification from the application process or revocation afterward. I understand the incomplete applications may not be considered. The person named as the contact person for the application is so authorized to serve as the primary contact for this application on behalf of the applicant.



Signature

Bryan Setser

Printed Name

Board President

Title

2/26/13

Date

II. Mission and Purposes

State the Mission of the proposed charter school in **one hundred words or less**. The mission statement defines the organization's purpose and primary objectives, describing why it exists. The mission statement provides the foundation for the entire proposal.

The mission statement of the proposed charter school is as follows:

This mission of North Carolina Connections Academy (NCCA) is to help students in grades 6-12 throughout the state who need an alternative to the traditional classroom, for a particular time period, to maximize their potential and meet the highest performance standards by providing a unique individualized full-time learning program, access to high quality North Carolina-certified teachers, and valuable parental involvement.

Educational need and Targeted Student Population of the Proposed Charter School:

1. Provide as description of Targeted Population in terms of demographics. In your description, include how this population will reflect the racial and ethnic composition of the school system. Describe the rationale for selecting the location and student body.

“As of 2012, thirty-six North Carolina public charter schools have closed their doors. Twenty-nine of those schools cited an area of financial deficiency as their reason for closing.”¹

****Per TCS-U-015, NCCA will receive the same rate as a full-year course in the NC Virtual Public School, without the benefit of local funds, for eight courses per student (estimated at \$3,500 per student per year). While this funding level is appropriate for students taking part-time virtual classes, it is not sustainable for a fiscally- and educationally-sound, full-time virtual school. A similar funding model to the brick-and-mortar charter schools which combines both state and local funding, however, would allow for a sustainable and fiscally- and educationally-responsible school. Therefore, where applicable in this application, we identify our response as only being viable if the funding is increased to a similar model. To provide an example, we describe NCCA operations throughout the application based on the Durham County state allocation provided in the Resource Manual (\$4,554.57) plus a very conservative local funding amount (\$1,750.00), totaling \$6,304.57 per student per year.****

“The workplace and global economy have changed dramatically. Competition and work are global for every type of product and service. Work is completed on 24-hour cycles that depend on a web of technology and people who may be on another continent just as easily as in the office next door. Students in our schools need education that reflects the challenges they will face as adults.” - Website of North Carolina Superintendent June Atkinson²

NCCA proposes to operate a statewide virtual school enrolling students in grades 6-12 living throughout the state. The student body will reflect the racial and ethnic composition of the state. The school will address a growing need for students to be educated outside of traditional brick-and-mortar schools, substantiated by the dramatic growth of virtual charter schools across the country. National figures count nearly 200 full-time virtual charter schools serving close to 100,000 students in 20 states³. While brick-and-mortar schools reach students within their

¹ <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/charterschools/best/governance.pdf>

² <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/statesuperintendent/>

³ Center for Education Reform, www.edreform.com

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.

Statewide schools mirror the demographics of the state. Of the students who attend schools affiliated with our proposed vendor, Connections Academy, over 40% met the federal free and reduced lunch guidelines mirroring the national average of 42.9%⁴. According to the Department of Public Instruction's Free and Reduced Lunch Report, 53.86% of enrolled students met the federal income guidelines in 2010-2011⁵. We anticipate that NCCA's families will be similar to the state average and will include many of modest means as well as significant numbers of single parent/dual working parent households.

North Carolina reported 181,950 students with disabilities in 2010-2011 school year⁶ and it is ranked 18th in the country for the number of English Language Learners (ELL) students according to the U.S. Department of Education (2009-2010)⁷. Connections Academy-affiliated schools have demonstrated success with special needs populations and ELL populations nationally serving an average of 9.8% of students with IEPs. In California and Nevada, two Connections Academy-affiliated schools are effectively serving ELL students. For those Connections Academy-affiliated schools that are their own LEA, the special education percentage can be as high as 18%, as it is at Commonwealth Connections Academy in Pennsylvania. It is anticipated that 12% of students at NCCA will special needs students.

2. What will be the projected enrollment at the school and what percentage of the Average Daily Membership (ADM) does that reflect for the local LEA(s) that may be impacted?

NCCA anticipates enrolling approximately 1,000 students in Year 1; 1,500 students in Year 2; and 2,500 students in Year 3. The statewide ADM total for all LEAs for the 2011-2012 school year was 1,462,134⁸. Therefore, NCCA's project enrollment reflects 0.068% in Year 1, 0.100% in Year 2, and 0.170% in Year 3.

Through its research on virtual charter schools around the country, the Governing Board understands that approximately three percent of the total student population in a state may choose this option. To increase accessibility to this school to those students who may need it, and because it is anticipated that there will be a low number of students from any one LEA who choose to enroll, the Governing Board has chosen to serve students statewide.

3. Explain how the charter school's education plan will compare to or differ from that of the local LEA(s) and the NC Virtual Public School.

NCVPS augments a high school student's local program of study by offering courses that the student is unable to take at his or her local school. By contrast, NCCA will offer a full-time virtual educational program, similar to local LEAs which offer state-aligned curriculum with North Carolina-certified teachers. The NCCA program will include students in grades 6-12 who need more than supplemental courses and require flexibility in the administration of their public school education on a full-time basis.

⁴ http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d09/tables/dt09_042.asp

⁵ <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/fbs/resources/data/>

⁶ <http://apps.schools.nc.gov/pls/apex/f?p=1:14:1279585925320502::NO::>

⁷ <http://www.eddataexpress.ed.gov/data-element-explorer.cfm/deid/4/>

⁸ <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/fbs/accounting/data/>

4. In Appendix A, you must provide evidence through a narrative or visual of this educational need through survey data, or times and locations of public meetings discussing this proposed charter school. (Please do not provide more than one sample survey form).

There is strong demand for our school throughout North Carolina. Without any marketing or parental outreach efforts, over 600 families have expressed interest in learning more about our program when available. In addition, a virtual information session was held on February 28, 2013 during which information was shared about the proposed public charter school. More detail is provided in Appendix A.

5. Designate how this proposed virtual school model is a fit for North Carolina which has a strong NC Virtual Public School program already in existence. Specifically identify and describe the un-served or under-served needs that are currently missed by NCVPS.

NCCA will reach students who need a flexible schedule and for whom a cutting-edge virtual approach provides the best pathway to success. NCCA will promote academic and emotional success for every learner through an individualized learning program combining the best in virtual education with real and engaging connections among students, family, teachers, and the community. The NCCA approach provides students in grades 6 - 12 with the opportunity for enrollment in a public school outside of the traditional classroom on a full-time basis when the supplemental NCVPS program is not an option or will not meet the needs of a particular student.

Purposes of the Proposed Charter School:

In one page or less, describe how the proposed charter school will achieve one or more of the six legislated purposes as specifically addressed in the NC charter school statute G.S. 115C-238.29A, and the proposed school's operations.

The Six Legislated Purposes of a Charter School are:

1. Create new professional opportunities for teachers, including the opportunities to be responsible for the learning program at the school site.
2. Hold schools accountable for meeting measurable student achievement results.
3. Provide parents and students with expanded choices in the types of educational opportunities that are available within the public school system.
4. Improve student learning.
5. Increasing learning opportunities for all students, with special emphasis on at-risk or gifted students.
6. Encourage the use of different and innovative teaching methods.

NCCA meets all six legislated purposes. By providing unique professional opportunities for teachers, using data for real time decision making and accountability, and incorporating innovative use of technology to improve student learning, NCCA is truly a model of innovation. *(A definition of terms is provided in the beginning of Section III.)*

1. Teaching in a virtual, on-line learning environment presents a unique opportunity as the teacher and student are in different locations. NCCA provides teachers a performance pay model and a career ladder which promotes growth opportunities. Teachers also participate in ongoing professional development opportunities both internally and externally through a graduate online program offering teaching courses at Boise State University.

2. NCCA’s educators, parents, and students will use Connexus™, an Education Management System (EMS), to carefully monitor each student’s progress and to maximize each student’s performance. NCCA is responsible for student scores on all required state assessments as mandated by North Carolina’s NCLB flexibility waiver (approved May 31, 2012) and will ensure student achievement and maintain a high level of accountability.
3. This statewide full-time virtual program provides a differentiating option to parents and students. NCCA will offer the curriculum for grades 6–12 thus giving the student who succeeds in this type of educational environment with the ability to continue from middle school to high school graduation.
4. The use of technology allows for individualized instruction and competency-based evaluation thus improving the education process. Teachers track student progress through Connexus identifying problem areas quickly and allowing them to put a plan in place to correct learning deficiencies in timely manner. In a virtual setting, students master skills at their own pace with guidance and support from full-time certified teachers. Learning is demonstrated through ongoing and meaningful assessments that drive learning for the individual student.
5. NCCA will provide students who are at risk, gifted, or need a specialized focus with lessons and resources personalized for their specific needs. Without the typical classroom constraints of space, students can be placed in the appropriate course (e.g., honors math and basic reading). The personalized learning approach benefits both struggling students and high achievers. The placement process assures that each learner is provided with the most appropriate curriculum, pacing, and teaching approach from day one. NCCA teachers will work closely with a student’s Learning Coach (a parent or another caring adult designated by the parents) to assure a steady flow of appropriate activities for students working below and/or above grade level. In a virtual environment, students are able to work significantly below or above grade level without fear of ostracism or other negative social repercussions that students sometimes face in a more traditional school setting.
6. The unique education platform offered accommodates each student’s needs by fusing learning in the classical tradition with innovations in technology. The virtual school program stimulates creativity in students by offering an environment that allows learning to transcend beyond the walls of a traditional public school. Some examples of innovative tools include LiveLesson™ and Teachlets™. Each NCCA student has access to powerful learning software and communications tools through Connexus, developed to deliver instruction and communicate with students and their families. NCCA professional staff will use Connexus to carefully monitor each student’s progress through the curriculum and to individualize the program to maximize each student’s performance.

Goals for the Proposed Charter School:

1. How will the governing board know that the proposed public charter school has attained their mission statement? What metrics will be used to gauge that success and how often will the metrics be reviewed in your analysis?

As a virtual charter school, NCCA will gather, monitor, analyze, and report more granular data about its effectiveness than most traditional, brick-and-mortar schools. Connexus, designed specifically for virtual schools, is intended to provide 360-degree accountability through comprehensive data collection, analysis and reporting to all stakeholders. (*We provide more*

detail regarding Connexus throughout Section III, and specifically in response to Question #1 under Virtual Platform Delivery).

With integrated high-quality curriculum and strong accountability measures, a student's academic success is consistently monitored, evaluated and focused on by all stakeholders—parents, teachers, students and administrators. The school's performance will be measured and communicated continuously to parents and reported monthly by its Governing Board.

Additionally, the Governing Board is responsible for ensuring that all aspects of the financial and programmatic accountability systems meet the obligations to the Office of Charter Schools, Department of Public Instruction, and the State Board of Education. Plans for monitoring and reporting on the effectiveness of curriculum, instructional methods and practices include:

- **Student achievement.** The Governing Board will hold NCCA and Connections Academy accountable for student academic growth. Student achievement is viewed through a number of lenses: measurable learning gains, performance on the state standardized tests, and meeting or exceeding the Annual Measurable Objectives (AMO) from North Carolina's NCLB flexibility waiver.
- **Stakeholder feedback:** The Governing Board will take into account and hold NCCA responsible for positive stakeholder feedback, including regular feedback received from parents and students via StarTrack. This integrated rating system allows every NCCA student (along with every Learning Coach) to rate each lesson from one star (low) to five stars (high). Ratings are used by curriculum staff to identify areas of needed improvement as well as curriculum approaches that work especially well. This same tool is also used to rate the school itself. The StarTrack system is fully embraced by students, teachers, the school's leadership, and the curriculum department as a dynamic means to provide real-time feedback on the quality of the curriculum and the school.
- **Parent satisfaction.** The Governing Board is focused on parent satisfaction. Parents enroll students in virtual schools for a variety of reasons, not only academics. Therefore it is important to gauge their satisfaction based on their reasons for enrolling their child, not just on the student's academic performance. NCCA families will be given an annual opportunity to participate in a thorough parent satisfaction survey, conducted by an independent market research firm and overseen by the Governing Board. The school's goal is that at least 90% of families agree that the curriculum is high quality and that they are satisfied with the program.
- **School growth.** NCCA has a responsible plan for school growth that is both scalable and thoughtful, wanting to offer this program to as many students as possible each academic year while growing the program in a fashion that positions both the students and the school for future success. The schools hopes to responsibly grow from 1,000 students (Year 1) to up to 2,500 (Year 3) through a combination of parent outreach, serving its existing families well (student retention), and strong word-of-mouth (current families attracting new families).
- **Compliance with state law.** The Governing Board will measure NCCA against compliance with state law regarding public education and specifically charter schools, including the Charter Schools Act, NCGS 115C-238.29D(b) and State Board of Education (SBE) policies. This compliance will include the timely and accurate reporting of required state data.
- **Fiscal accountability.** The Governing Board is fully committed to fiscal accountability including cost control, responsible growth, and regular audits.

2. Provide specific and measurable student achievement performance goals for the school’s educational program and the method of demonstrating that students have attained the skills and knowledge specified for those goals. These goals should include specific and measurable objectives over the first three years of the schools existence.

****Per TCS-U-015, NCCA will aim to meet the additional standards expected of virtual schools related to overall performance. In order to meet these standards, NCCA requires adequate funding. Therefore, these standards are set assuming the preferred example funding of \$6,304.57 per student per year as stated previously (instead of \$3,500 per student.)****

- a. NCCA will test at least 85% of students during any academic year for purposes of the State’s accountability system.
- b. NCCA’s graduation rate will be no less than 10% below the overall state average for any two out of three consecutive years.
- c. NCCA will not have a student withdrawal rate any higher than 30% for any two out of three consecutive years for students who enroll and start their educational program and do not complete the school year. As most full-time virtual schools experience higher withdrawal rates than traditional brick-and-mortar schools, particularly during the first semester, NCCA does not anticipate meeting the 15% withdrawal rate requirement unless this rate is defined as students who are enrolled on day one of second semester who have acclimated to the virtual school model and represent a more stable school population.
- d. Should NCCA receive the requested example funding, the student to teacher ratio will be 38:1. However, at the funding level of \$3,500 per student, the ratio will exceed 50:1 .

NCCA will adhere to the same accountability measures, administer the same state assessments and follow the same proficiency measures as all public charter schools in North Carolina, in addition to using its own internal assessment tools. NCCA’s assessments combined with quality curriculum and instruction will improve student achievement and maintain a high level of accountability.

Per TCS-U-013⁹, “All new charter schools receiving a preliminary charter must participate in a year-long planning program which includes the application process beginning in February of the previous year, prior to the charter school’s opening for students.” The Governing Board recognizes and supports the timeline and planning year process. Upon charter approval, we will convene frequently to ensure the proper development of NCCA’s curricular, financial, marketing, and facility plans. We will work with the Office of Charter Schools on planning, staff development, finance, governance, board training, marketing, policies and procedures, and securing a school site. We acknowledge that final approval of the charter is contingent upon successfully completing all of the requirements of the planning program.

⁹ <http://sbepolicy.dpi.state.nc.us/policies/TCS-U-013.asp?pri=04&cat=U&pol=013&acr=TCS>

III. Education Plan

Note: All sections of the Education Plan should align with all other sections of this application. The State Board of Education will give priority consideration to the applicants who demonstrate potential for significant, meaningful innovation in education. Provide precise and clear explanations. Lack of response to any question or proper documentation **could deem the application incomplete.**

Instructional Program

Provide a detailed description of the overall instructional program of the proposed charter school, including major instructional methods, assessment strategies, and explain how this instructional program and model meet the needs of the targeted student population.

Definition of Terms: The description of the NCCA educational foundation and culture includes some unique terminology offered by our proposed vendor, Connections Academy.

- **Assessment Objective Performance Reports (AOPR):** This report provides real-time student performance on each of the essential skills and standards based upon individual assessment items. It measures the objectives students should master by the end of that grade level based upon North Carolina Essential Standards and the Common Core State Standards. Data can be sorted to identify students who have mastered or not mastered specific objectives.
- **Curriculum Based Assessments:** The program uses curriculum -based assessments CBAs as a quick and effective way to gather, through telephone conversation, additional information on students' understanding of concepts. Diagnostic curriculum-based assessment (DCBA) pinpoint strengths and weaknesses in student mastery of concepts and verification curriculum based assessment (VCBA) gauge authentic student learning of concepts previously graded as successfully completed with scores of B or higher.
- **Connexus™ Education Management System (EMS):** Connexus is the platform for organizing and managing the entire Connections Academy educational environment. This proprietary, web-based software delivers every assignment and tracks every activity (whether conducted online or offline) while monitoring the completion of individual lessons as well as mastery of discrete skills and knowledge. Connexus operates within a secure and robust technology infrastructure protecting data from loss and intrusion while maintaining a safe environment. Parents and students access Connexus to organize, document, and interact, ensuring an unprecedented level of time-on-task documentation.
- **Longitudinal Evaluation of Academic Progress (LEAP):** Students in grades 6-8 take the LEAP, a technology-facilitated pre-, mid-, and post-test. LEAP provides essential diagnostic information for developing and planning instruction. It provides an early read on a student's performance on state-mandated tests, and reports key accountability data on student progress throughout the academic year.
- **Learning Coach:** A parent, extended family member, or similarly qualified adult designated by the parent/guardian, works in person as a Learning Coach with the student under the guidance of the certified teacher. The Learning Coach and student interact with the teacher via telephone, WebMail message, LiveLesson sessions, and in-person meetings. The school provides ongoing training to help the Learning Coach carry out this important role while making optimum use of the available technology tools and professional teacher support.

- **LiveLesson® Session:** A real-time web conferencing tool, LiveLesson sessions allow teachers to work synchronously with individual or groups of students using voice over IP, chat, electronic whiteboard, and shared web surfing based on Adobe® Connect™ .
- **Multi-tiered Intervention:** Connections Academy employs a multi-tiered intervention model so that every student has access to the resources they need to be successful: Tier 1 – Core Instructional Program; Tier 2 – Supplemental Programs and Supports; Tier 3 – Alternative Programs. NCCA’s Student Support and IEP Teams meet regularly to develop an intervention plan and strategies for improvement for students who are struggling.
- **Personalized Performance Learning™:** This instructional process creates a unique learning experience for each student. During enrollment, placement specialists review students’ past records and performance to properly place them in the program. A Personalized Learning Plan (PLP) is developed collaboratively by the teacher, Learning Coach, and student to maximize achievement and to tailor curriculum and instruction. Throughout the year, teachers monitor students’ progress and adjust their learning programs to focus on areas where students need to improve and to build on students’ strengths.
- **SSTAIR™:** This Connections Academy instructional model deeply links curriculum, standards, assessments and interventions that have a direct impact on student mastery and resulting standardized test performance. The SSTAIR program targets Essential Skills/Standards by subject/grade level, uses specified assessments within the curriculum to measure student mastery of these skills and standards, provides tiered interventions for non-mastered skills and standards, and then tracks students’ response to the implemented interventions by skill/standard. SSTAIR is an acronym for **S**kills, **S**tandards, **A**ssessment, **I**ntervention, and **R**esponse.
- **StarTrack™:** This integrated rating system allows every student, Learning Coach, and teacher to rate each lesson in which they engage from a low of one star to a high of five stars. Ratings are used by the curriculum staff to ensure continuous feedback and identify areas of needed improvement as well as curriculum approaches that work especially well. Learning Coaches are able to rate their overall school experience using a similar system.
- **Student Status/Escalation Process:** NCCA will track and report ongoing student progress based on the objective numeric data generated by Connexus. NCCA will analyze attendance, participation, performance, assessment submissions, and teacher contact. The status is displayed on the home page for instant identification of potential problem areas. The Escalation Process goes into effect when students are in statuses other than ‘On -Track’ in order to ensure students continue to gain the full benefits of this educational option and are being educated appropriately through this unique school choice.
- **Teachlet Tutorials:** Teachlet tutorials (proprietary, interactive, asynchronous graphic/video/audio tutorials) are incorporated into most lessons and provide students a dynamic, fun, and engaging way to learn the concepts they need to complete the lesson. Teachlet tutorials are created in Flash® to provide maximum media impact for minimum bandwidth and will also be converted to HTML5 to support iPad and tablet functionality.
- **WebMail:** This proprietary system is securely located within Connexus. Students, Learning Coaches, and teachers may only use it to communicate with each other, protecting them from spam, contact from strangers, and other mainstream email issues.

At NCCA, students in grades 6-12 – 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 are individualized instruction, high-quality teaching, and parent involvement.

Individualized Instruction: NCCA students will work with rigorous curriculum aligned to not only North Carolina Essential Standards but also Common Core State Standards. Instruction focuses on the individual student and assessments, including frequent formative assessments and teacher directed curriculum based assessments. Students, parents, and teachers use accurate and timely data allowing students’ growth to be tracked over time. Individualizing instruction allows for multiple pathways for achievement. Students work individually on their personalized learning plan (PLP) maximizing their potential by challenging academic strengths and diagnosing and addressing academic weaknesses. Students are at the center of the Learning Triad™ (illustrated in Figure 1). 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.

High-quality Teaching: NCCA teachers will implement the Core Standards for Facilitating Student Learning at Connections Academy 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. Leaders, using data from Connexus, will drive professional development both for individual teachers and the school as a whole.

Parent Involvement: Parents serve as Learning Coaches and play an active role in the learning process providing input and communicating regularly with teachers. Regular feedback through surveys and the StarTrack system encourages summative and formative feedback for the learning process and the program. Training is also provided to parents to ensure that they have the necessary tools and supports to be successful Learning Coaches. The whole family may get involved in health programs, community programs, and field trips.

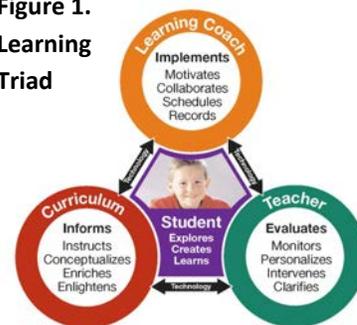
The key facets of the Connections Academy instructional model are as follows:

The Learning Triad: Instruction at Connections Academy-affiliated schools surrounds each student with the resources needed for success. Each student is part of a Learning Triad.

A complete learning team: Student learning benefits from committed educators and involved parents who provide total support. Members of each student’s learning team include a face-to-face Learning Coach; one or more North Carolina-certified teachers; and trained Connections Academy curriculum specialists and education resource center staff. In effect, each NCCA student has a staff of experts working together to leverage the school’s myriad resources – technological, instructional, and interpersonal – for success.

The Learning Coach: Each 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 student under the guidance of the certified teacher. At the high school level, the Learning Coach is less involved with daily instruction but serves an important supervisory role for the student.

Figure 1.
Learning Triad



Certificated Teachers: Each student has one or more certificated, North Carolina teacher specially trained in the curriculum and instructional method. Teachers work closely with each student one-on-one 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 student's performance. 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/or WebMail – 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. These expectations form the basis for the Core Standards for Facilitating Student Learning at Connections Academy. Teacher evaluations and competencies are aligned to these standards of teaching.

Student: North Carolina-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 Academy's unique PPL approach, each student is provided with instructional programs tailored to meet the student's individual needs. The personalization process includes: 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.

Virtual Platform Delivery

1. Describe the portal or learning management system and how it works. Include information on how much synchronous teacher interaction students will receive for instruction. What other types of direct, real time contact will students receive from instructional and/or administrative staff of the virtual charter school?

The school anticipates engaging Connections Academy of North Carolina, LLC, an affiliate of Connections Academy (a division of Connections Education LLC), for curriculum, technology, and other services in compliance with North Carolina statute. As part of this engagement, Connections Academy will provide its Education Management System, Connexus, a combination of a learning management system, student information system, and communication tool. Connexus creates a rich, vibrant virtual classroom experience that allows parents, teachers, and students to work together in a supportive environment. The comprehensive, reliable, and user-friendly system is designed to guide students through a rigorous curriculum in a way that also meets their individual learning needs. Students and parents are able to access NCCA 24 hours per day from any Internet connection. Connexus allows teachers, students and parents to:

- View daily, weekly, and monthly schedules at a glance
- Access all lessons and course assignments
- Monitor progress through an up-to-the-minute grade book
- Receive alerts through secure WebMail messages
- Communicate with teachers and other students and families via message boards
- Provide ratings and written feedback about specific lessons and overall learning experiences

LiveLesson sessions allow teachers and students to interact with one another in real time in a ‘virtual classroom.’ Teachers use the LiveLesson tool regularly to convene groups of students together to focus on particular learning topics, and may also use LiveLesson for independent student work groups to collaborate on activities, via chat, electronic whiteboard, and shared web surfing. 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 NCCA 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 NCCA staff and Community Coordinators – parent volunteers whom NCCA supports in organizing such activities for families who live nearby. 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 NCCA community, parents can feel comfortable that their children are experiencing this technology safely within NCCA.

2. Explain how the virtual charter school will ensure hands-on laboratory and physical/kinesthetic experiences as part of the students’ education.

Students at NCCA engage in hands-on experiences as part of their day-to-day instructional experiences. Students receive a collection of physical materials, science kits, and supplies to supplement and enrich the learning experience including books (i.e. Antigone, Julius Caesar, Lord of the Flies), Froguts, hand lens, magnet, rock and mineral kit (advanced), safety goggles, streak plate, thermometers and Virtual CHEMLab.

We will also research options to partner with a local organization such as the Museum of Life + Science in Durham, the Discovery Place in Charlotte, and the Morehead Planetarium and Science Center to provide the hands-on laboratory experience. The DESTINY (Delivering Edge-cutting Science Technology and Internet across North Carolina for Years to come) Traveling Science Learning Program is Morehead Planetarium and Science Center’s brings effective science learning to students and provides support for teachers.

- Field Trips: Each year, students, teachers, and parents take learning on the road with a variety of school-sponsored optional trips to museums, farms, science center, or the Great Smokies.
 - [Hightouch Hightech -- Science Made Fun!](#) (Wake County)
 - [Mint Hill Country Doctor's Museum and Country Store](#) (Mecklenburg County)
 - [International Civil Rights Center and Museum](#) (Guilford County)
- Clubs and Activities: Clubs and activities include academic clubs, chess club, robotics club, volunteer and service clubs, and literary and arts club.
- Lab Investigation – Rocks and Minerals Kit: Offering a hands-on forensics style of learning, this tool lets students perform experiments on rocks and minerals in a high-tech, interactive virtual learning environment.
- Lab Investigator - Chemical Reactions: High School students engage with an interactive periodic table, build and balance chemical equations, watch videos of chemical reactions in an actual lab setting by certified chemists, and record observations for their teacher.
- Lab Investigator- Dissection: Students increase their understanding of anatomy and traits of different organisms as they view videos, research specimen, and create lab reports.

- Virtual Spring & Digital Scale: Simulating an actual scale, students measure the force in Newtons of a set of items. Students hang objects from the spring scale and use the spring scale to drag objects across a flat surface or up a ramp at various degrees. Students engage in measurement as they select containers such as flasks, beakers, and weighing paper, zero the weight, add materials to measure, and mix and match various containers and materials.
- Virtual Pan Balance: Students learn metric and customary units as they engage with an interactive tool to measure, compare, order, and convert.
- Virtual Geoboard: Through this online tool, simulating a traditional pegboard and rubber band geoboard, students engage on hands-on methods of determining perimeter and area, plus visualizing division by grouping.

3. Enrollment:

- a. Define “attendance” at the virtual charter school. Describe how this will be regularly collected and monitored by school officials.

Students in a virtual school program will not have physical classrooms but still must meet all regulatory requirements for attending public schools. These requirements including the required number of hours of instruction (1,025) will be documented in the School Handbook (which will be finalized and approved by the Governing Board.) Learning Coaches ensure that students meet their school’s attendance requirements and that the student’s attendance is properly documented as required by NCCA. 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 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 Handbook. All students must complete assigned lessons and submit specified assessments to their teachers. Students and/or their Learning Coaches must also participate in/respond to telephone calls, WebMail messages, 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.

NCCA equates attendance with actual work completion. NCCA will not accept logging on, or the submission of a Learning Coach’s record of hours worked, as sufficient proof that attendance has occurred. NCCA will pursue a Learning Coach 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.

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.

- b. Portray the proposed student enrollment over the first three years of operation. Explain how those figures were collected and from where the applicant believes they will draw the largest number of students.

NCCA anticipates enrolling 1,000 students in Year 1; 1,500 students in Year 2; and 2,500 students in Year 3. We anticipate students from every county to enroll, with the number of students from each county aligning with state population, resulting in most of our students being

residents of Mecklenburg, Guilford, and Wake Counties, and as such have used them as examples throughout this application. As the Projected Enrollment Table in Section IV shows, it is expected the overall percentage of students to be very low from any one LEA.

It is also anticipated that 50-60% of the students will come from the traditional classroom; approximately 20% from homeschooling and the rest from private schools or students new to school in North Carolina (students moved from another state). Students whose instructional needs will be effectively met by NCCA 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, full-time virtual instruction; students pursuing artistic or athletic careers or career development opportunities requiring a flexible schedule; children who are homebound due to illness or disability; and students with special learning needs.

c. Describe strategies that will be utilized to ensure the virtual charter school does not surpass a 15% student turnover. Provide information on how these procedures will be clearly implemented before and during operation of the virtual charter school.

Nationally, Connections Academy-affiliated schools have on average a 25% withdrawal rate, similar to other online schools. Students who attend a virtual charter school typically do so for a variety of reasons; however, virtual schools are not the right fit for all students. Families who are new to this educational model may not fully understand it until they are actively participating, regardless of initial outreach. In most states, the enrollment process mandates that virtual schools accept all students regardless of the appropriateness for a particular student or family.

In some cases, students enroll in a virtual school as a last option prior to dropping out of school. The Colorado Department of Education (CDE) recently conducted a study of online schools in that state and found "...greater percentage of students are seeking an online school as their last school option before dropping out. In 2010-2011, 59% of online dropouts had transferred from another Colorado district or school within months of dropping out. Conversely, of dropouts statewide, 34% transferred from another district or school within months of dropping out."¹⁰ NCCA anticipates the student turnover rate will be less than 30%.

For those students that it is appropriate for, virtual schools serve them well. The CDE study also found that, "More than half of incoming 9th grade online students are enrolling in an online school for the first time. Of incoming 9th graders who were in online schools previously, fewer than 10% had been enrolled in an online school for four years or more. However, this small percentage of students who remained enrolled in an online school for four years or more performed comparably to and sometimes better, on average, than all 9th graders statewide. This finding demonstrates that online schools are a good option for some students, in particular those who remain enrolled in an online school for multiple years."

NCCA will engage families early in the enrollment process to ensure that responsibilities working in the online environment are understood and that they have selected the right educational option. Information sessions will be held across the state well before NCCA begins the initial enrollment process. An information session for interested parents, community leaders and stakeholders was held on February 28, 2013. It was held virtually to reach a statewide

¹⁰ http://www.cde.state.co.us/onlinelearning/download/OL_Research_Final.pdf

audience and attendees had the opportunity to ask questions. Additional information sessions will be held both virtually and in-person throughout the application process and beyond.

After the initial application is complete, the academic placement team will communicate with families and students on the appropriate coursework and document these discussions and decisions in appropriate logs. Students and families will participate in orientation and onboarding activities to support their successful transition to an online learning environment and NCCA. Through the implementation of NCCA's SSTAIR instructional model, PPL program, teacher/student/ family contacts, and escalation system, teachers, students and Learning Coaches (*definition of terms provided at the beginning of Section III*) will engage in ongoing monitoring of student learning and achievement.

- d. Offer assurances that the proposed school will identify, address, and resolve attendance issues so that this school will not be overfunded. Include descriptions of the proposed virtual school's absentee or truancy policy as well as policies for withdrawing students.

If a student becomes ineligible or leaves the charter school, NCCA will ensure that all appropriate paperwork is submitted and/or forwarded to the new school. Schools will pursue truancy violations in situations where the student can't be confirmed as attending as documented by their work product. NCCA will follow the compulsory attendance policy in GS-115C-378.¹¹

NCCA's proposed vendor is very familiar with, and has performed successfully on, state initiated audits. In Ohio, the Connections Academy-affiliated school is required to enter data concerning the enrollment and attendance of students into the School Options Enrollment System (SOES), used by the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) to make payments to schools. ODE Area Coordinators regularly conduct full-time enrollment (FTE) reviews to verify the accuracy of the enrollment and attendance data entered by the school into SOES. NCCA would be open to a similar process in North Carolina.

An ODE FTE review team examines enrollment and attendance policies, student enrollment data and the procedure for maintaining enrollment and attendance documentation that substantiates whether the FTE reported in the SOES for funding is accurate. The review team compares the source enrollment and attendance data with the SOES data submitted by the school for funding and checks for the validity of the IEPs being implemented in the school.

4. Education:

- a. Describe how the school will ensure that teachers are planning instruction, assessing learning, and reporting outcomes to parents and administrators.

Instruction and assessment efforts begin with a thorough student placement process and progress review, including online and offline placements tests, which help to customize the student's academic program and formulate the PLP.

NCCA will also use the SSTAIR method as its instructional model, which relies on student assessment data for continuous monitoring of student progress. Beginning with North Carolina Essential State Standards and Common Core State Standards, teachers will be able to easily see what students should be able to do by the end of a specific grade in each of the core area subjects. The PLP tool will place at each teacher's fingertips all of the assessment data available

¹¹ http://www.ncleg.net/EnactedLegislation/Statutes/HTML/BySection/Chapter_115C/GS_115C-378.html

for students, e.g. state test scores, LEAP pre- and post-test assessment data, participation and performance metrics, and any IEP information.

Intervention Indicators are displayed to facilitate a teacher's identification of students who may be in need of instruction in math, reading, or both. In addition, at both the section and individual student levels, the AOPR can be generated displaying not only the essential skills and standards for a course, but also exactly where in the curriculum each of these is assessed. 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. This method:

- Enhances the multi-tiered instruction model
- Identifies essential skills and standards by subject/grade level
- Identifies how and where these essential skills and standards are assessed within the program
- Provides a Response to Intervention model
- Provides access to and analysis of real time data to determine mastery/proficiency
- Incorporates data-driven decisions throughout instruction
- Maximizes use of the instructional support programs, resources, and data; identifies tiered interventions for non-mastered/proficient skills and standards, and identifies students' response to the implemented interventions

NCCA will utilize ongoing online and offline assessments to measure student progress and a technology-based assessment tool to measure student gains over the school year.

- **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:** LEAP provides essential diagnostic information for developing the PLP and planning instruction. It provides an early read on performance on state-mandated tests, and reports key accountability data on progress throughout the academic year.
- **Ongoing informal assessments:** Students will engage in several formative assessments that tap into all levels of student learning such as: 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.
- **Unit assessments and offline and online portfolio assignments:** Throughout each logical unit of study, students are required to complete a series of offline and online assessments. Offline assessments include written compositions, science lab reports, short answer questions and essays, book responses, and a variety of work samples. 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, feedback, and expertise from certified teachers. Student progress reports and grades will include a combination of quizzes, tests, work samples, and teacher feedback.

- **Curriculum-Based Assessments:** NCCA uses curriculum-based assessments (CBA) as a quick and effective way to gather, through telephone conversation, additional information on students' understanding of concepts. Diagnostic curriculum based assessment (DCBA) pinpoint strengths and weaknesses in student mastery of concepts. Verification curriculum based assessment (VCBA) gauge authentic student learning of concepts previously graded as successfully completed with scores of B or higher.
- **Baseline achievement data:** If possible state standardized test results will be integrated into an incoming student's basic information in Connexus. Likewise, results for state standardized tests, which are proctored face-to-face at a physical location, that students take while enrolled at NCCA will be included in Connexus, along with internal pre-, mid-, and post-test data. This data will be used to track student progress from year to year and within the year, and to inform course placement and instructional needs of students.

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.

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 NCCA staff and will be made available to the Governing Board, parents, Department of Public Instruction, and members of the public by posting it on the school's public website. Frequent and purposeful communication with parent and Learning Coaches will help the teacher monitor the student's progress, keep parents "in the loop" with current school happenings, and help NCCA grow and improve from parent feedback.

Scheduled phone calls, LiveLesson sessions, WebMail messages, and face-to-face meetings can all be used to help conduct parent-teacher conferences. NCCA 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.

- b. Define the administrative evaluation protocol for each staff member. Include information about when the staff will be informed of the evaluation instrument to be used and how the administration will utilize this tool to supervise staff.

The NCCA teachers will implement the Core Standards for Facilitating Student Learning at Connections Academy 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, using data from Connexus, will drive professional development for individual teachers and the whole school.

NCCA will implement Connections Academy' 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 system is

integrated with Connexus and provides detailed data in designing goals and determining performance metrics in relationship to student performance. The Governing Board will review the Performance Evaluation System, make modifications, and approve for use at NCCA.

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 administrators will be evaluated based on a combination of competencies and goals. Competencies and goals are reviewed with staff at the beginning of the school year, and are available for viewing and comment throughout the year.

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.

- c. Share the process for providing frequent, ongoing monitoring of an individual student's program – by both staff and administration – that will be used to verify each student is achieving in the virtual learning system.

Teachers and administrators continuously monitor student work via Connexus while implementing the SSTAIR instructional model, which relies on student assessment data for continuous monitoring of student progress. This systematic approach ensures that all students receive the necessary level of support throughout the learning process.

- d. Provide the intervention procedures utilized when students begin to struggle on assessments or fail to provide relevant work production.

NCCA 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. Students' responses to interventions are monitored and adjustments to the type and intensity of support are made as needed.

NCCA will form a Student Support Team (SST) and an Individualized Education Program (IEP) Team 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 session participation, enrollment in instructional support programs, or other review or remediation programs such as Program for All Children to Excel (PACE™), an intervention program focusing on building proficiency in reading and math skills. 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.

- e. Discuss how the proposed school plans to implement the statewide testing requirements that include online as well as paper and pencil tests. Particularly, assurances must be provided that the school will comply with the 95% rule.

NCCA is dedicated to meeting and exceeding all of North Carolina's goals and grade level requirements. NCCA will participate and follow the North Carolina Testing Program. At in-person, proctored locations, NCCA students will participate in proficiency tests, eventually all of

which will be online, depending upon grade level in addition to other statewide assessments, as required. Students enrolled in NCCA will participate in all required assessments including:

- Students in grades 6 and 7 take end-of-grade (EOG) tests in English language arts and mathematics during the last 15 days of the school year.
- Students in grade 8 take EOG tests in English language arts, mathematics, and science during the last 15 days of the school year.
- Students at grade 8 take EXPLORE exam.
- Alternate assessments are available for many of the state tests for students with disabilities who have Individualized Education Programs (IEPs).
- All students identified as limited English proficient must be annually assessed to determine progress and level of English language proficiency
- Students enrolled for credit in courses where end-of-course (EOC) tests are required must take the appropriate end-of-course test. These courses are Algebra I, English II, and Biology. EOC tests are given during the last 15 days of the instructional period for 4x4/semester courses or the last 20 days of the instructional period for traditional yearlong courses.
- Students at grade 10 take the PLAN in October.
- Students at grade 11 take the ACT in March.
- Students at grade 12 who are identified as Career and Technical Education concentrators are required to take the WorkKeys assessments.
- All students identified as limited English proficient must be annually assessed to determine progress and level of English language proficiency.

Results of these assessments will be reported through the Department of Public Instruction as well as communicated directly to NCCA parents. The Governing Board and 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 Department of Public Instruction. NCCA assures that 95% of students enrolled in each EOG or EOC assessments will complete the assessment for that course in a testing environment that follows the Testing Code of Ethics Guidelines.

f. Explain the processes used by the school to regularly update its content offerings for students.

The curriculum is updated regularly, with Governing Board approval, based on a rigorous analysis of student performance in relation to Carolina Essential State Standards and Common Core State Standards as measured by state testing results and internal assessments. The curriculum is regularly evaluated, upgraded, and enhanced (Figure 2) based on the needs of the school and students. Annual updates are communicated in the Connections Academy Program Guide and as well as the website.

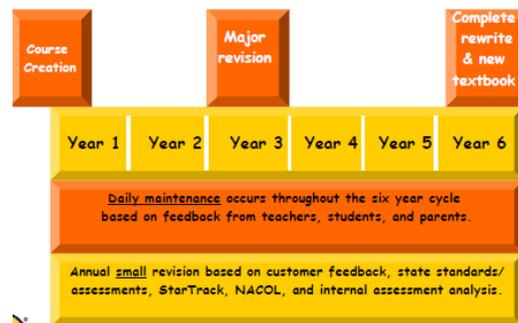


Figure 2. Course Creation and Review Process

Teacher Course Liaisons, who are experts in their curricular areas, gather feedback from other teachers across all Connections Academy-affiliated schools, and work with the curriculum department to make updates and revisions to the curriculum based on this teacher input.

- g. List all equipment, services, training, or software that will be provided to all students (i.e. textbooks, internet connectivity, hardware/software, or storage devices). Also, specify what equipment each student or family is responsible to provide, and how the proposed school will assist those who cannot meet these access components.

NCCA will provide the online and offline materials students need to succeed. A complete list of courses, materials, lessons, textbooks and supplies can be at the following URLs:

- <http://www.connectionsacademy.com/curriculum/middle-school/free-online-learning.aspx>
- <http://www.connectionsacademy.com/curriculum/high-school/free-online-learning.aspx>

NCCA will ensure access isn't an issue for students and families. NCCA will loan computers and subsidize Internet usage for those students where lack of technology would present a barrier to enrollment based on need. All NCCA-provided computers are equipped with heightened Internet security settings and Internet filtering software that can be activated upon request. Families may choose to provide their own computer or laptop and/or Internet service.

It is important to NCCA that technology and Internet barriers do not prevent a disadvantaged family from participating in this school. The Governing Board may contract with Connections Academy to lease technology and technology services as outlined in the Professional Services Agreement, based on their history of providing this service to 24 schools in 22 states serving over 40,000 students. Contracting for equipment and services ensures that NCCA and its students have the latest technology to experience the greatest benefit from the program.

- h. Share the availability of hardware and/or application support that will be made available to every student by the proposed virtual charter school.

Sessions are available to help students and Learning Coaches learn how to use Connexus. Though Connexus is very easy to use, these sessions help users get the most benefit from the platform's many powerful features. Students and Learning Coaches can speak with a friendly Connections Academy representative at any time simply by calling a toll-free number. Representatives provide expert tech support, answer questions, and directly connect callers with other resources as needed. There is also a searchable Online Help system. If using their own computer, Connections Academy's Technical Support will help students and parents configure Internet security settings and find additional Internet filtering software.

- i. Describe the proposed virtual charter school's procedures to deliver instruction in the event of impaired equipment or loss of connectivity due to inclement weather conditions (i.e. hurricanes, ice storms).

Connexus has fault tolerance and redundancy built into it at every level. If any one component in Connexus fails, its load is immediately picked up by other components and service is not interrupted. The power system at the network operations center (NOC), where the Connexus technology components are housed, has redundant generators and Internet connections. Multiple systems monitor all components of Connexus, including hardware and software, 24/7. Alerts are sent immediately whenever an issue is detected—from a bug in the software of a course to a server failure—and the Education MIS and Development staff respond to every alert with immediate and appropriate action. Regular Connexus releases occur every two weeks and hotfixes when necessary can be applied any time. Operating system, firmware, and service patches are applied to all systems on an ongoing, scheduled basis with patches typically being applied to production systems after a testing period in other environments.

In addition to the Connexus infrastructure, Connections Academy technology support staff members have an expansive knowledge of computer technology and the Education Management System. They help Learning Coaches and students to troubleshoot any problems they are having with Connexus. The support team members also have remote diagnostic tools that allow them to “see” a student's computer and correct most problems from afar, including completely reimaging the computer back to the default configuration. In the event that the hardware needs to be replaced, the support staff can have a replacement sent to them.

Connections Academy provides extensive technical support via toll-free phone service and email. During regular business hours (9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Eastern Time, Monday-Friday), calls and emails are routed directly to the Technical Support staff on duty. After hours and on weekends, requests for help are recorded and responded to the next business day.

- j. Share the plans for shipping and handling of textbooks, supplies, and other educational tools to the enrolled students (as well as back to the vendor upon conclusion of the year or withdrawal by the parents).

NCCA will ship instructional materials, without additional cost to the families, including necessary hard copy textbooks, consumable print materials, Learning Coach support materials, and instructional supplies needed for a high-quality learning experience at home. Some of NCCA’s ongoing assessments will take the form of student portfolio work products (including work in the student’s handwriting) sent in by physical mail by the student. NCCA will arrange for physical non-consumable materials to be shipped back at the end of the year (or at the end of three years should the student have school technology).

- 5. With virtual charter schools being new to North Carolina, describe the typical day for a virtual charter school student and virtual charter school teacher.

Typical Student Day: The time commitment it requires of students is comparable to that of a traditional school day. Since NCCA 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 NCCA; 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. Figure 3 represents an example of a student school day. Activities vary based upon student needs, coursework, and personal schedules. Learning is integrated within individual activities as well as LiveLesson sessions and phone calls with teachers. Learning can occur when students learn best – not just between 9 a.m. and 3 p.m.

Figure 3. A Day in the Life of an NCCA Student

SAMPLE STUDENT “DAY IN THE LIFE”	
Morning	Learning Coach logs on, reads messages, and reviews lessons.
	Student reads and responds to WebMail messages from teacher about progress.
	Student participates in math LiveLesson session with teacher and classmates.
	Student completes a math lesson. Learning Coach monitors and facilitates learning.
	Student completes a Language Arts lesson, including reading, writing, and discussing the lesson activities and text. Student completes a spelling lesson and takes a quiz online.
	Student and Learning Coach go outside for half- mile run with friends.
Afternoon	Student and Learning Coach make soup for lunch, as part of the Home Life Course.
	Student completes a science lesson and finishes reading a non-fiction reading selection.

SAMPLE STUDENT “DAY IN THE LIFE”	
	Student does hands-on science experiment outside and begins a rough draft of science report.
	Student and Learning Coach head off for the student’s Scouts meeting
	Student completes art lesson and begins art project then participates in Club/Activity. Learning Coach records attendance.
	Student and Learning Coach review next day’s schedule and make sure they are prepared.

Typical Teacher Day: The school day is not limited to certain hours for start and end times; however, the teaching staff will be available during the hours of operation, typically 8 a.m. – 4 p.m. NCCA teachers will work primarily from a teaching center. Teachers collaborate to share ideas, information, and teaching techniques with the families who are always welcome to visit.

Figure 4. A Day in the Life of an NCCA Teacher

SAMPLE TEACHER “DAY IN THE LIFE”	
Morning	Teacher logs on, reads messages, and reviews individual student attendance, progress and performance.
	Teacher sends a WebMail message to a student answering a question; teacher responds to Learning Coaches’ questions/feedback.
	Teacher holds a science LiveLesson session with a group of students and notes who is struggling to follow up with those students with after the lesson.
	Teacher grades student portfolio assessments.
	Teacher has a 1:1 session with a student who needed additional guidance.
	Teacher meets with other staff for a brown bag professional development lunch to discuss student progress using the Assessment Performance Objective Report
Afternoon	Teacher checks WebMail & grades assessments that have been submitted
	Teacher calls 5 students to do a Curriculum Based Assessment (CBA)
	Teacher prepares for next day, posting reminders and challenge questions on message board.

6-12 Curriculum and Instructional Design

Describe the basic learning environment (e.g. classroom-based, independent study), including class size and structure.

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. NCCA will generate enthusiasm and excitement for the lifelong process of learning by providing a curriculum that is relevant, integrated and age-appropriate and is aligned to North Carolina Essential State Standards and Common Core State Standards. Students 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 individualized focus of a virtual school, along with the one-on-one learning environment, often has a positive impact on students’ ability to succeed. Online education allows flexible class sizes because classroom management, distractions, and other factors are not an issue in a virtual classroom. The individualization of the PLP, the use of technology, and the design of the curriculum creates the ability to assign class loads based upon student outcomes desired, interaction requirements, and course design.

Should NCCA receive the requested example funding, the school will be staffed with an anticipated the student to teacher ratio will be 38:1. However, at the funding level of \$3,500 per student, the ratio will exceed 50:1.

Provide a synopsis of the planned curriculum, including:

1. One sample course scope and sequence (preferably in graph form) in the Appendices (Appendix B) for one core subject (specific to the school's purpose) that the school would ultimately serve.

We provide a sample course scope and sequence in Appendix B.

2. Identify how this curriculum aligns with the proposed charter school's mission, targeted student population, and North Carolina Accountability Model.

NCCA prepare students for the global economy they will be living and working in as adults. The personalized approach will provide important skills to students including independent thinking, problem solving and collaboration not only with people in their community but potentially across the globe. NCCA students will be prepared for the global economy with job-skills for the 21st Century. All of these features align with and support the mission of the school.

The Accountability and Curriculum Reform Effort (ACRE) addresses the Common Core State Standards and North Carolina Essential Standards. The NCCA curriculum and instructional program aligns with the Common Core State Standards for mathematics and English Language Arts as adopted by North Carolina, and also meets the state's own standards for English as a Second Language, Science, Social Studies, World Languages, Arts Education and Healthful Living. Beyond the alignment of content, however, NCCA as a virtual school is uniquely positioned to develop on a daily basis students' skills in accessing, evaluating, and synthesizing information; working collaboratively with peers in cross-cultural settings to solve problems and apply knowledge; and to see themselves as empowered, ethical world citizens.

NCCA will also align with and support the new accountability model. NCCA will focus on measures of career and college readiness to ensure students are prepared for life post-high school and to ensure they have the critical academic skills to choose and follow their appropriate path. We understand that school performance will be reported with a letter grade of A, B, C, D, or F.

NCCA's proposed research based¹² curriculum uses proven instructional 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
- Instructional design provides students opportunities to improve learning skills using technology (virtual labs and instruments, Teachlets, 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

¹² 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>

- Lesson introduction is effective and presents lesson objectives, accesses prior knowledge, sets expectations and motivates
 - Background information prepares students to access new content, skills, and strategies
 - Curriculum includes opportunities for developing problem-solving and critical thinking skills and real-world applications, collaboration and independent study, and to develop oral and written communication skills
 - Curriculum incorporates ongoing formative assessment and provides timely and appropriate feedback to students and teachers
 - Curriculum promotes active learning: Each Connections Academy 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.
3. Describe the primary instructional strategies that the school will expect teachers to master and explain why these strategies will result in increased academic achievement for the targeted student population.

Individualizing instruction allows for multiple pathways for learner achievement. Students work individually on their PLP, maximizing their potential by ensuring that academic strengths are challenged and that any academic weaknesses are diagnosed and addressed. Instruction is customized to best fit a student's individual needs. Teachers tap into a wide array of resources and modify lessons as needed for each student. NCCA teachers will be provided training and ongoing professional development on the PLP process, as well as the SSTAIR instructional model. Teachers will demonstrate mastery of the content and instructional strategies, and will be monitored for their use of these strategies to monitor and increase academic achievement.

Teachers will creatively personalize their approach to each student's learning. Teachers provide focused learning opportunities through individual or small group learning sessions via the phone, LiveLesson sessions, Message Boards, and WebMail messages. Teachers monitor and motivate students, continually assess students' progress, and modify, enhance, and supplement lessons to emphasize areas where students are deficient or have a particular strength or interest. Teachers will have the time and ability to develop a rapport with their students.

1. Provide an explanation of the proposed school's academic calendar that includes a brief narrative on how the calendar coincides with the tenets of the mission. Also include how the virtual school will determine when a student has completed the course – whether that is competency or calendar based.

The Governing Board will approve the 10-month school year calendar annually. The academic calendar will include a minimum of 185 days. To support the mission of a virtual school, the school calendar may be extended to allow families more flexibility in completing work, or to provide extra learning time for students who are at risk (generally not by more than two weeks). Although there is more flexibility in a virtual school program than in a traditional school regarding when instruction occurs, students are still expected to follow the school calendar.

The Governing Board-approved school calendar 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.

To determine if a student has completed a course, the full-time certified teacher will confirm that the student has completed all lessons and assessments (including end of course exams, where applicable). The teacher will, both one-on-one and in small groups:

- Monitor and evaluate the student's learning and progress in the course, including reviewing, grading, and providing feedback on assessments.
- Conduct targeted LiveLesson sessions to intervene when the student is struggling and further engage and enhance learning when the student demonstrates mastery.
- Communicate instructional guidance promptly and fully with students, parents, and Learning Coaches (via WebMail messages, phone conversations, and message boards).
- Modify the student's program to meet his or her needs (e.g., lesson pacing and modifications; custom assessments; supplemental instructional interventions).
- Keep track of student and family interactions and program modifications via Connexus

Figure 5. Proposed 2014-2015 School Calendar for Students in Grades 6-12 - Required Days: 185

First Day of School	Sept. 2, 2014
Columbus Day (No School in Session)	Oct. 13, 2014
Veterans' Day Break (No School in Session)	Nov. 10-12, 2014
Thanksgiving Break (No School in Session)	Nov. 26-28, 2014
Winter Break (No School in Session)	Dec. 22, 2014 – Jan. 2, 2015
Martin Luther King, Jr. Day (No School in Session)	Jan. 19, 2015
First Semester End Date	Feb. 2, 2015
Presidents' Day (No School in Session)	Feb. 16, 2015
April Break (No School in Session)	April 3, 2015
Spring Break (No School in Session)	April 20-24, 2015
Memorial Day (No School in Session)	May 25, 2015
Last Day of School	June 23, 2015

2. Provide a visual disseminating what courses (core content and electives) will be offered in year one through year three of the charter high school. Please ensure the projected staff and budget aligns with the course offerings.

Please visit the following URL to view Connections Academy’s extensive course list for high school students including both core classes and electives. The inclusive set of core courses cover subjects in math, science, language arts, and social studies. They also offer many elective courses in areas such as foreign languages, digital technology, journalism, and art history.

<http://bluetoad.com/publication/?m=1702&l=1>

3. Describe the primary instructional strategies that the school will expect teachers to master and explain why these strategies will result in increased academic achievement for the targeted student population.

We previously provided this information in response to Question #4 a-j.

4. Explain how the proposed instructional plan and graduation requirements will ensure student readiness for college or other post-secondary opportunities (trade school, military service, entering the work force).

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. NCCA will address credits, transcripts, and counseling. Teachers and counselors in use four-year academic, progression plans for students to ensure they are on target for graduation and for meeting their college and career goals. A Progression Plan, automated in Connexus, defines and tracks requirements which must be accomplished to meet a goal. The most common use currently is to track students in meeting their graduation requirements. In the future it will be used to track speech therapy goals or completion of courses in middle school.

NCCA students who enroll in the program for grades 6-8 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 NCCA high school program will include a significant amount of computer-facilitated learning. 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 online-only textbooks.

Students also have the option to take Career Technical Education (CTE) courses such as:

- Business: Introduction to Business
- Business Information Systems
- Business Law
- Business Communication
- Health, Safety & Nutrition
- Introduction to Sociology
- Intro to Early Childhood Education
- Medical Terminology
- Research Methods
- Professional Career Development
- Introduction to Psychology
- Anatomy & Physiology and Human Diseases
- Introduction to Medical Assisting
- Clinical Medical Assisting Duties
- Introduction to Law
- Criminal Investigation
- Intro to Criminal Justice
- Principles of Marketing
- Intro to Astronomy
- Electronics: Electronic Devices
- Accounting 1
- Introduction to Finance

With 18 Advanced Placement courses at their fingertips, NCCA students will be prepared for college. Graduates of Connections Academy-affiliated schools have been accepted at Harvard, Amherst, Vassar, Williams, Wellesley, Bryn Mawr, Bowdoin, Pennsylvania State University, Ohio State University, and hundreds of other colleges. The Counselor will work with post-secondary institutions to arrange college explorations for NCCA students.

Whole-Child Development

1. Discuss all extra-curricular programs that will be offered to students that may attend the proposed virtual charter school.

Connecting with other students is one of the most important parts of a great school experience. Through Connections Academy, NCCA will be able to offer more clubs and activities than any other online school. 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 Academy-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. A club in a Connections Academy-affiliated school in Pennsylvania won the state engineering competition, for a third year in a row, competing against brick-and-mortar and other virtual schools, and took second place in the national competition, proving that the program is a perfect combination of real-world face-to-face learning and virtual education.

Face-to-face activities include field trips and community outings facilitated by NCCA staff and/or community coordinators – parent volunteers whom NCCA will support in organizing such activities for families who live nearby. Field trips may include visits such as:

- [North Carolina State Museum of Natural Sciences](#) (Wake County)
- [Carolinas Aviation Museum](#) (Mecklenburg County)
- [Millis Regional Health Education Center](#) (Guilford County)

NCCA will produce monthly newsletters that celebrate student and school successes, showcase student work, provide tips from teachers, and highlight upcoming events. Connections Academy also produces an online yearbook, in which students are encouraged to participate. NCCA will apply for a chapter of the National Honor Society. Of Connections Academy-affiliated schools nationwide, 17 are members of the National Honor Society and 11 of those are members of the National Junior Honor Society.

2. Describe when and how the virtual school will bring students together for social functions thereby creating and promoting the school’s culture.

Families are encouraged to participate in various back-to-school and end-of-the-year events such as picnics or other activities such as bowling leagues as well as educational field trips offered throughout the year. These activities and events are organized through the school staff and community coordinators throughout the state. Families are notified through webmail and the school newsletters. Clubs and activities let students:

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

3. Explain the process utilized to attend to student health through physical education class, healthful living instruction, and other activities.

NCCA is committed to ensuring students participate in a planned physical education program designed to optimize their physical, mental, emotional, and social development. We ensure students are engaged in a variety of physical activities and sports they enjoy and will pursue throughout their lives. The physical education program supports state standards and:

- Maintains physical, social, and emotional health in students by practicing healthy behaviors and goal setting.
- Engages students in a physically active lifestyle.
- Is age and developmentally appropriate and is taught at each grade level.
- Focuses on the acquisition of important personal, interpersonal, and life skills.
- Is coordinated and managed by an education professional.
- Engages parents and community members.
- Is periodically reviewed, evaluated, updated, and improved.

To ensure students utilize safe, efficient, and effective movement to develop and maintain a healthy, active lifestyle and will apply health-related and skill-related fitness concepts and skills, students are enrolled in a comprehensive, sequential physical education program which includes:

- The Presidential Fitness Challenge.
- At least 150 minutes of health, safety and physical education per week in all grades (unless otherwise specified by state requirements and/or students' educational plans).
- Grade 6-8 physical education courses that integrate: Connections Academy Physical Fitness Program, the Personal Fitness Program, and Yoga. The courses provide students the option to start with one program and choose another as they proceed through the course or to participate in the same program throughout the course. Course content generally includes nutrition guidelines and tips for leading a healthy lifestyle.
- High School core and elective courses in physical education, personal fitness, and health fitness and nutrition.

Teachers monitor students' participation and performance using the escalation system, the school's GradeBook, and Curriculum Based Assessments. To track students' day-to-day physical activities and ensure participation, Connections Academy developed a proprietary "Activity Tracker" tool that enables students to personalize an electronic log to track activity type, duration, and frequency, such as jogging, aerobic training, flexibility training, yoga, etc. The activity type and time requirements are auto-populated by grade and state requirements. Students export the data to their teacher and the data is used to verify students have engaged in physical fitness activities and have met the requirements.

4. Provide an overview of the virtual charter school's counseling services to address development of the whole child. Be sure to include specifics related to future academic decisions, student disengagement, and emotional growth.

NCCA's counselors will be dedicated to helping students reach their full potential, assisting with:

- Academic goal-setting, scheduling, and planning
- Personal and social development
- College & career planning
- Helping students succeed

With Master's degrees and specialized training, counselors are skilled at helping students address the personal, social, and academic issues that can affect their success in school and in life.

Counselors hired in North Carolina will have appropriate licenses and state certifications. The counseling program is built on relationships, so counselors are readily accessible to students and families—online, in-person, and by phone. With the additional support from the national Connections Academy office and its collaborative network of school counselors, counselors will bring both individual attention and national expertise to students and families.

Counselors will carefully review each student's transcript to determine when an Honors or AP course is appropriate. Counselors help high school students prepare for college and career with:

- Personal Learning Plans focusing on post-graduation goals
- Interactive LiveLesson sessions connecting families with real-time information on financial aid and scholarships, college application processes, entrance requirements, and more
- College test preparation courses for the SAT examinations
- One-on-one counseling with seniors to provide resources and assistance with post-secondary planning, including: career options, vocational training, and selecting the right college.

5. List strategies teachers and guidance counselors will use to build positive, nurturing relationships for instruction through the proposed portal.

Connexus allows parents, counselors, teachers, and students to work together in a safe and supportive environment. Connexus allows communication with teachers and other students and families via secure WebMail messages and message boards. LiveLesson sessions, 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.’ Threaded discussions on course-based message boards are also used as appropriate by grade level to provide opportunities for collaboration and interaction.

Special Programs and “At-Risk” Students

1. Describe the methods and clear systems of prevention and intervention teachers will utilize to provide assistance to students that are not performing at expected levels: ensuring continued progress and academic student growth.

Connections Academy experts in special education, gifted education, and English language learning are on hand to assist the NCCA staff. Teachers regularly differentiate and personalize instruction as part of the SSTAIR Instructional Model, a multi-tiered RTI and Supplemental Instructional Support Programs (SISPs). This three-tiered model involves administration of universal screeners, implementation of targeted interventions as needed, regular assessment and progress monitoring and data collection to measure the student’s response to intervention. The SST meets regularly to identify and discuss strategies to assist struggling students.

Using universal screeners such as the LEAP pre-, mid-, and post-assessments and DIBELS, as well as general education progress, teachers identify struggling students and intervene initially at the Tier 1 level. Tier 1 interventions include proprietary and third-party tools and strategies to differentiate instruction. If data shows students did not make progress with Tier 1 interventions, students are then moved to Tier 2 in the SSTAIR model. Tier 2 interventions include targeted LiveLesson sessions as well as Supplementary Instruction Support Programs (SISPs) such as SuccessMaker and MathXL. If a student is still not progressing, the data is used to determine the student’s greatest area of need, and a special education referral is completed. Staff collect all data and makes the special education referral in a timely manner according the best practice and state special education regulations.

2. Explain how the instructional plan and curriculum will meet the needs of English Language Learner (ELL) students, including the following:
 - a. Methods for identifying ELL students.

All incoming students will be required to fill out a home language survey which will be retained in the student’s record. Based on the information in this form, students may be referred for further language testing to identify their specific level of English proficiency. The testing and placement occurs using tests required by North Carolina (e.g., the WIDA ACCESS, W-APT) and using trained test administrators.

- b. Specific instructional programs, practices, and strategies the school will employ to ensure academic success and equitable access to the core academic program for these students.

In a virtual school like NCCA, students with special learning needs, including ELL, enjoy individualized instruction without being isolated from the mainstream curriculum or their peers. The Connections Academy 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. Based on their identified level of proficiency and needs, students 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.

A Connections Academy curriculum specialist with ESL/LEP/ELL training or an ELL coordinator will be available to work with NCCA 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. NCCA also anticipates that a portion of its ELL students will be effectively served by the regular NCCA 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.

To meet the needs of ELL students with less English speaking proficiency, NCCA will deploy a comprehensive 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 program addresses the language acquisition needs of students in a virtual learning environment through the integration of technology and the support of certified teachers. Instructional support helps students attain proficiency in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Services include language software, teacher consultation with Learning Coaches to guide instructional practice, teacher modification of content lessons and/or assessments, and direct instruction via LiveLesson.

c. Plans for monitoring and evaluating the progress and success of ELL students, including exiting students from ELL services.

NCCA will maintain ELL student files; provide instructional consultation and modification of lessons, assignments, and assessments to Learning Coaches 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 sessions 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. NCCA will assess progress and improvements in English proficiency. All mandated state tests for ELL students will be administered as required by law.

Per GCS-K-000, NCCA will adopt appropriate evaluative standards for measuring progress. In order to determine when students no longer need assistance, NCCA will determine the content knowledge and language skills necessary for successful functioning in the regular classroom. Then, multiple instruments as well as teacher judgment will be used to evaluate listening and speaking skills, literacy skills, and content area knowledge. The students will not be maintained in alternative language programs longer than necessary based on program exit criteria and will be monitored after exiting such programs for a minimum of six months and additional academic and English language support will be provided if the students begin to have difficulty.

3. Explain how the school will identify and meet the needs of intellectually gifted students, including the following:
 - a. Specific instructional programs, practices, strategies, and opportunities the school will employ or provide to enhance their abilities.

NCCA will implement the robust Connections Academy Gifted and Talented program for middle school and the Honors/AP program for high school, which together achieved a 97% satisfaction rating by parents nationally. NCCA will meet the state requirement to prepare Group Education Programs (GEPs) for academically gifted students providing a differentiated instructional program for students who share similar academic characteristics and program needs.¹³

The placement process assures that such learners are provided with the most appropriate curriculum, pacing, and teaching approach from day one. NCCA teachers will work closely with Connections Academy 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 middle school Gifted and Talented program provides 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 sixth grader with a high aptitude in math could be placed in an eighth-grade math course, while continuing to take sixth-grade-level courses in other subjects. The program covers 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 high school program offers a rigorous college preparatory curriculum providing an opportunity for students to enroll in Honors and AP courses. Students may choose from dozens of Honors courses and 18 AP courses. Honors courses provide students with opportunities to participate in extension projects, investigations, and activities that require integrated skills application and higher-level thinking and understanding. Counselors carefully review each student's transcript to determine when an Honors course is appropriate.

- b. Plans for monitoring and evaluating the progress and success of intellectually gifted students. NCCA will monitor the success of intellectually gifted students by reviewing and assessing performance on state assessments, LEAP assessments, AP exams, the ACT and SAT, and by tracking College Acceptances of high school seniors.

Exceptional Children

The public charter school cannot deny admission to any child eligible for special education services identified under the federal legislation *Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) Amendments of 2004* (20 U.S.C. 1400 et. seq.), IDEA regulations, and Article 9 of 115C of the North Carolina General Statutes, North Carolina Policies *Governing Services for Children with Disabilities*. All public schools are responsible for hiring licensed and

¹³ <http://ncrules.state.nc.us/ncac/title%2016%20-%20education/chapter%2006%20-%20elementary%20and%20secondary%20education/subchapter%20h/16%20ncac%2006h%20.0107.html>

“highly qualified” special education teachers pursuant to law. Public schools are required to provide a full continuum of services to meet the unique needs of all students with disabilities.

Identification and Records

1. Explain how a virtual charter school will identify students who are enrolled within the charter school that have previously been found to be eligible for special education services or are protected under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act.

**** Should NCCA receive the requested example funding of \$6,304.57 per student, it will employ a Manager of Special Education to assist with all aspects of serving exceptional children. However, if the funding level remains at \$3,500 per student, NCCA will not be able to afford this key role. The description of this role and associated duties is predicated on the school receiving appropriate funding.****

NCCA 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. Furthermore, the distribution of specific disabilities among these students is similar to that in brick-and-mortar public school settings.

Students enrolling in the charter school who do NOT already have an IEP or a prior diagnosis for special education

Identification: To ensure service is provided for students entering NCCA without prior diagnosis for special education, the Principal and Manager of Special Education, together with the Connections Academy special education team, regularly review teacher observations, assessment results and other data to identify any possible special education needs. The Manager of Special Education will serve as the Child Find coordinator and conduct location activities. These activities include providing periodic Child Find information in parent newsletters, using the Connexus "banner message" to inform parents, coordinating with appropriate state and local organizations and agencies, as well as ensuring public awareness through outreach each fall about NCCA special education services and procedures.

Pre-referral/Referral/Evaluation: NCCA staff will form a Student Support Team (SST) consisting of general education teachers, intervention specialists, school administrators, and Connections Academy specialists who review each special education referral made by teachers, parents, or others. The SST will determine if the student's needs can be met through Response to Intervention with curriculum modifications, or if a formal referral for special education evaluation is warranted. If the former, the teacher then implements and documents suggested modifications, lesson adaptations, and alternative instructional strategies, and conducts progress monitoring of the student's level of success with each intervention. If the SST suspects that a student requires a special educational evaluation, the following procedures are implemented:

- The teacher consults with the Principal and the Manager of Special Education to complete an official special education referral. The parent is notified of this referral.

- Parental consent for the student evaluation is obtained and the appropriate evaluations are arranged. Parents are sent a copy of Procedural Safeguards.
- Parent is invited to the interdisciplinary IEP Team meeting to review the assessment results.

IEP Development: If, as a result of evaluation, the IEP Team determines that the student has a disability, an IEP meeting is scheduled at the NCCA office, at another mutually agreeable site, or by telephone or in a LiveLesson session. Parents are invited to attend. IEP goals are formulated with parental consent.

Students enrolling in the charter school who already have an IEP

IEP Review: Per the Office of Charter Schools Enrollment and Lottery Guidance dated 2/17/12¹⁴, NCCA will ask families, after the application process, to disclose if their child has an IEP. After enrollment, NCCA staff will review the existing IEP and take one of these actions:

- If the IEP already reflects a virtual environment, the student continues through the enrollment process with the existing, compliant IEP.
- Within the first 30 days of school or the student's enrollment, an IEP conference is held with the team to revise the IEP and document the student's official change of placement. During the interim NCCA implements the student's IEP to the extent possible.
- If a student with an IEP from another district in North Carolina transfers into the school, NCCA (in consultation with the parents) will provide a free appropriate public education to the child (including services comparable to those described in the child's IEP from the previous district - to the extent possible), until NCCA either (1) adopts the child's IEP from the previous district; or (2) develops, adopts, and implements a new IEP that meets the applicable state requirements.
- If a student with a disability who is receiving special education services pursuant to an IEP in another state transfers to the school, NCCA will, in consultation with the parents of the pupil, provide the pupil with a free appropriate public education including services which are comparable to the services described in his/her previous IEP. NCCA will continue to provide such a free appropriate public education to the pupil until such time as the school conducts an evaluation of the pupil and develops a new IEP for the pupil, if determined appropriate, in accordance with applicable federal and state law.

Annual Reviews: The Manager of Special Education will facilitate Annual Reviews of the IEP including a review of student progress within the existing IEP, creation of new IEP goals; and obtaining parent consent for and approval of new IEP, and provide a qualified administrator to oversee IEP meetings. In order to make efficient use of staff resources, IEP meetings may be held at the NCCA office, at another mutually agreeable site, or by telephone or LiveLesson session. Specific arrangements will be made on a case-by-case basis and will be in accordance with all applicable law.

Rehabilitation Act of 1973 - Section 504 Eligible Students: This Act, commonly referred to as §504, 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

¹⁴ <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/charterschools/fag/enrollment-lottery.pdf>

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 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.

2. Provide a plan detailing how the records of students with disabilities and 504 accommodation plans will be properly managed.
 - a. Requesting records from previous schools
 - b. Record confidentiality
 - c. Record compliance

NCCA will comply fully with the requirements of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), a federal law that gives parents/legal guardians and students certain rights regarding the student's education records. Included is the right to the protection of a student's education records and "personally identifiable information" from unauthorized disclosure.

In addition to the requirements of FERPA, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) provides additional privacy protections for students who are receiving special education and related services. Part B of the IDEA incorporates and cross-references FERPA. NCCA is aware of the cooperation between FERPA and IDEA and will adhere to the requirements of both.

The school will also comply with the Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment and the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act of 1998 ("COPPA").

Under FERPA an enrolling student would fall under one of certain exceptions that would allow for NCCA to receive student education records from a previous school without the prior written consent of parents. However, upon enrollment in NCCA, administrative staff will ask parents to provide written consent for the release of their student's education records by signing a Release of Records form allowing the school to receive the information from the students' previous district. Per FERPA, there are other exceptions to the release of student education records without the prior written consent of parents. NCCA is aware of such exceptions and, outside of these, will require the written consent of parents for the release of their student's education records to a third party.

While FERPA is vast in its discussion of the review, amendment, and privacy rights related to education records, it does not speak to the retention and destruction of such records and does not include a records retention plan. Along with a strict adherence to FERPA, NCCA will address record compliance with a records management program that addresses the creation, maintenance, storage and final destruction of records in accordance with North Carolina laws and regulations.

Exceptional Children's Education Programming.

1. Describe the educational programs, strategies, and additional supports provided to ensure a full continuum of services for students with disabilities through the online platform.

Virtual schools 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 students with disabilities include, but are not limited to:

- Consultative support to the regular education teachers to provide modifications and accommodations to the general education curriculum
- Direct special education support to a student which may be provided via the telephone, Internet, LiveLesson sessions, as well as in person depending on the needs of the student
- 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 Connexus of every conversation (phone, WebMail message, LiveLesson session) and consultation with the student and/or parent as well as general education teachers
- 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

NCCA will comply with all state and federal policies regarding enrollment of special education students. After submitting the initial application to the school, all families are asked if their child has an IEP within the last three years and if that IEP is currently active. The IEP is reviewed to determine the level of each student's need and consider the types of services that are required. In most cases, NCCA teachers can provide the necessary accommodations in the general education program. The Manager of Special Education works closely with the general education teachers to ensure that every student is getting what they need to access the general education curriculum.

Since NCCA will be a program focused on individualization, it is a good fit for most students with special needs. In addition to the regular placement activities, the Manager of Special Education will review each IEP, analyzing the level of functioning, educational needs, and suggested accommodations/modifications to determine how NCCA can meet the student's needs in the least restrictive environment. To support enrolled students with IEPs, NCCA 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.
- 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.

NCCA will benefit from Connections Academy's more than 10 years of experience in identifying and successfully serving students with a wide range of learning needs and styles. Training is provided throughout the year for Manager of Special Education and teachers. A Connections Academy 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 Manager of Special Education on identification and service delivery for students with disabilities will be provided by Connections Academy.

2. Discuss the methods and support systems that will be in place to ensure students with disabilities receive a FAPE within the virtual environment.

As a public school NCCA shall, through its policies and procedures, comply with all applicable requirements of IDEA, 20 U.S.C. 1400 et. seq. 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). NCCA 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.

Special Services

1. Describe how the virtual charter school will do the following:
 - a. Identify students with special needs within the virtual environment as required by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

Teachers will utilize SSTAIR to track the student's response to the implementation of tiered instruction and interventions by skills and standards. The teacher alerts the SST where interventions, progress monitoring data, and strategies are discussed. The teacher collects data and documents progress and lack thereof, and the SST determines next steps. If the student continues to struggle, the teacher may consult with the school's Special Education team and implement additional modifications, lesson adaptations, and alternative instructional strategies. If the student needs an evaluation, parental consent will be requested via an assessment plan. Parents will be sent a copy of Procedural Safeguards. When the signed parental consent is returned, 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. A comprehensive IEP will be developed, documenting student-specific accommodations and modifications and specially designed instruction. If a student becomes ineligible or leaves the school, NCCA will submit all appropriate paperwork and/or forward appropriate documentation to the new school.

- b. Provide specified services to the enrolled students with special needs regardless of where the student resides within North Carolina.

Special education services include but are 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. Virtual schools 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, and psychological counseling to eligible students. Services include:

- Consultative support to the 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
- Careful logging in 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

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 minimal special education support to progress satisfactorily in the general education curriculum.

- c. Detail how the IEP meetings will be held and how implementation of the IEP will be monitored (and reported to students, parents, and relevant staff).

IEP meetings may be held at either the NCCA 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. NCCA will track and implement IEP timelines and requirements as per the appropriate laws and regulations.

- d. Implement Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Rehabilitation Act standards for accessibility to web-based curricula.

NCCA will provide equal opportunity and treatment, and make accommodations or modifications to avoid disability-biased discrimination. NCCA will make every effort to abide by federal regulations found in IDEA as well as Sections 504 and 508 of the Rehabilitation Act. Students can navigate their lesson content using only the keyboard. The content and structure can be understood by a student using a screen reader (e.g., JAWS, Kurzweil), a text reader (e.g., Natural Reader), or other types of assistive technology (e.g., voice recognition software or Dragon Naturally Speaking). There are text equivalents for all non-text media. This includes captions and/or alternative descriptions and assignments for audio, video, and images.

These features are the foundation of both the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines Version 2.0 Level AA and the Section 508 Technical Standards. Beginning in January 2012, Connections Academy implemented an Accessibility Support Desk (888-639-5960). Students (including vision-impaired, blind, deaf, and/or hard of hearing students) can call the support desk and schedule appointments with the Accessibility Associate who will assist the student with access.

2. Provide information about how the school will accommodate non-English speaking students while addressing their needs in online and offline instruction or other educational activities.

Using up-to-date screening results, teachers will implement a program based upon the student's English language proficiency level. Highly-qualified teachers will support ELL students through phone conferences and consultation with colleagues and Learning Coach(es), and direct instruction via LiveLesson sessions targeting reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Continuous progress monitoring will inform the level of support each student needs.

Student Performance Standards

1. Describe the student performance standards for the school as a whole.

The school's performance will be measured and communicated continuously to parents, reported monthly to its Governing Board, and accounted for through an annual report to the Department of Public Instruction. We will comply with the North Carolina Testing Program.¹⁵

¹⁵ <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/accountability/nctpoverview1213.pdf>

Figure 6. Academic Goal 1 - Student Performance

Academic Goal 1: Student Performance - Students will demonstrate mastery of key concepts and academic standards across core academic subjects.	
Measurement Tool/Data Source: Student performance is measured on internal assessments including quizzes, tests and portfolios, graded by the teacher and reported in real time through Connexus. Performance is tracked and aggregated for each student based on assessments.	
Objective 1.1: The school-wide performance rate will demonstrate mastery across all content areas.	Timeline/Target: The school-wide performance rate averaged across all reported months within the school year will be 75% or higher.

Figure 7. Academic Goal 2 - Yearly Academic Growth

Academic Goal 2: Yearly Academic Growth - Students Improve Achievement Level on State Assessments	
Measurement Tool/Data Source: Required State Assessments	
Objective 2.1: At least 80% of returning students’ (enrolled for state testing previous school year and current school year) state test scores will indicate proficiency or better, or will show improvement of at least one category (e.g., from “Achievement Level I” to “Achievement Level II” in the grades for which comparisons are possible).	Timeline/Target: Year 2.

Figure 8. Academic Goal 3 – Student Achievement Scores

Academic Goal 3: Student Achievement Scores - NCCA will meet or exceed statewide performance on key required state tests.	
Measurement Tool/Data Source: Required state tests together with other criteria (such as test participation) as defined and reported by the Department of Public Instruction.	
Objective 3.1: NCCA will demonstrate at least 85% participation in required state tests.	Timeline/Target: NCCA will achieve test participation rates of at least 85%.
Objective 3.2: All official published state test proficiency rates for the school will meet or exceed the state standard or average, whichever is lower for each tested grade level/subject area.	Timeline/Target: Percentage of students meeting or exceeding standards or average: Year 1: Within 5% points of state standard or average on the aggregate of grades and subjects tested Year 2 and Beyond: Meet or exceed state standard or average on the aggregate of grades and subjects tested.

2. Explain the use of any evaluation tool or assessment that the proposed charter school will use in addition to any state or federally mandated tests. Describe how this data will be used to drive instruction and improve the curriculum over time for the benefit of students.

We previously provided this information in response to Question #4e.

3. Explain the policies and standards for promoting students from one grade level to the next. Discuss how and when promotion criteria will be communicated to parents and students.

To be promoted to the next grade, students 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 North Carolina's promotion regulation.

4. Provide the public charter school's exit standards for graduating students. These standards should set forth what students in the last grade served will know and be able to do.

To graduate and receive a diploma from NCCA, a student must be enrolled during the semester immediately prior to graduation and earn a minimum of five of the credits (or 10 courses) required for graduation at NCCA (or another Connections Academy-affiliated school), with at least 1.5 of these credits (or three courses) earned at NCCA in the semester immediately prior to graduation. Each student must successfully complete a minimum of 24 credits (Carnegie units - 24 semester hours) to graduate.

High School Graduation Requirements

1. Provide details on how the students will earn credit hours, how grade-point averages will be calculated, what information will be on transcripts.

Connections Education (of which Connections Academy is a division) is accredited by AdvancED¹⁶. In addition, in an effort to ensure transferability of credits, NCCA will, within the first two to three years of operation, apply for accreditation through the Southern Association of Colleges & Schools Council on Accreditation and School Improvement (SACS CASI) similar to other Connections Academy-affiliated schools in South Carolina, Georgia, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Texas, and Florida. Also, most high school courses are also approved through the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) through a rigorous, approval process to meet NCAA requirements for initial-eligibility for college athletes¹⁷.

The curriculum uses a standard whereby one credit equals approximately 160 hours of instruction (North Carolina requires 150 clock hours). In order to graduate, each 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 graduation requirements. Graduation requirements will be set by the Governing Board through policy and will with North Carolina graduation requirements. Information on GPA and transcripts is provided in the Student Handbook in Appendix C.

2. Explain the plan for promoting and graduation for students with special education needs.

The school plans to have students with special needs graduate at NCCA in accordance with the terms of their IEPs. NCCA will provide a free appropriate public education to all students with special needs. As with all students, NCCA'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 a free and public education. NCCA 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.

¹⁶ Accreditation agency serving 27,000 public and private schools and districts <http://www.advanc-ed.org/>

¹⁷ http://www.connectionsacademy.com/Libraries/PDFs/NCAA_Approved_Course_List.pdf

3. Explain what systems and structures the school will implement for students at risk of dropping out and/or not meeting the proposed graduation requirements.

NCCA will implement the SSTAIR method, PACE program, and a three-tiered intervention program for students at risk of dropping out or not meeting the proposed graduation requirements. Within Connexus, counselors and teachers track data and monitor the students' progression plans. If students are behind in credits (or off-cohort for graduation) the counseling team works with them to create course schedules to get them back on track.

Counselors and teachers use reports within Connexus to create pivot tables showing a student's total number of earned credits and identified grade level and then comparing that information with the student's cohort year. If there is a discrepancy, the team devises a plan to get the student back on track for an on-time graduation. This plan may include summer school for original credit courses and credit recovery if necessary.

Students in Connections Academy-affiliated schools have the option to participate in summer school through the National Connections Academy. Summer school courses deliver a full semester's worth of instruction over an intensive four-week session so students can get the credits they need to catch up or get ahead. Summer school offerings include 6–8 Summer Smarts courses and high school credit recovery and enrichment courses.

Student Conduct

Provide a brief narrative that disseminates how student conduct will be governed at the proposed charter school and how this plan aligns with the overall mission and proposed Education Plan of the charter school.

Appropriate conduct will be expected of all students at NCCA. The student's code of conduct will include steps to be followed in the event of misbehavior. The school will regard academic honesty as key to its mission. It will be expected that students will adhere to the Honor Code, and that all schoolwork submitted in order to meet course or class requirements represents the original work of the student. NCCA will establish and adopt suspension and expulsion policies that will be distributed in the School Handbook. The School's discipline, suspension and expulsion policies will be in accordance with students' rights and with applicable law.

Provide a draft copy of the student handbook within the Appendices (Appendix C).

1. Practices the school will use to promote effective discipline.
2. A preliminary list and definitions of the offenses which may result in suspension or expulsion of students.
3. An explanation of how the school will take into account the rights of students with disabilities in regards to these actions that may or must lead to suspension and expulsion.
4. Policies and procedures disseminating due process rights, including grievance procedures, for when a student is suspended or expelled.

A draft of the student handbook is attached in Appendix C.

IV. Operations and Capacity

Governance:

Note: Please answer all sections completely, Do not use “same as LEA” or “whatever the law states”. Lack of proper documentation could deem the application incomplete.

Private Non-profit Corporation:

The non-profit corporation must be officially authorized by the North Carolina Secretary of State by the final approval interview date.

Name of private non-profit: North Carolina for Quality Virtual Education, Inc. d.b.a. North Carolina Connections Academy

Mailing address: 4 San Marcos Avenue, Durham, NC 27703

Street address: 4 San Marcos Avenue, Durham, NC 27703.

Phone number: (919) 638-7056

Fax number: (919) 287-2639

Name of registered agent and address: Corporation Service Company, 327 Hillsborough Street, Raleigh, NC 27603

Federal Tax-Exempt Status 501(c)(3)

If the non-profit organization has yet to obtain the 501(c)(3) status, the tax-exempt status must be obtained from the Internal Revenue Service within twenty-four (24) months of the date the charter application is given final approval.

The private non-profit listed as the responsible organization for the proposed charter school has received 501(c)(3) status:

Yes (a copy of the letter from the federal government is attached: Appendix D)

No

Federal Tax Identification Number: 45-4339430

Organizations Structure of Private Non-Profit Organization

The private non-profit corporation is the legal entity that has the responsibility for all aspects of the proposed charter school. Its members should reflect the ability to operate a charter school from both business and education perspectives.

Please complete the table provided depicting the founding members of the non-profit organization.

Board Member Name	Board Title	County/State of Residence	Current Occupation
Bryan Setser	Board President	Wake County /NC	Partner at 2Revolutions
Brian Oliver Smith	Board Treasurer	Wake County/NC	CEO Urban Planet Mobile
Priscilla Maynor	Board Vice President	Durham County/NC	EVP of CELT
Donna Sullivan	Board Secretary	Durham County/NC	NC Department of Commerce
Russ Jones	Board Member	Durham County/NC	CTO - Virante

Operational Components

“Gary Gruber (1999), a nationally known consultant for public charter schools, said, ‘No other singular variable is more important for the health and vitality of a school than the way it is governed.’”¹⁸

1. Explain where the administrative office(s) of the proposed charter school will be located in North Carolina. Please provide assurances that this office will not be located within a private residence or sectarian institution.

We have not secured a location for administrative office. We will begin upon application approval. The office will not be located within a private residence or a sectarian institution.

2. Describe how often and in what format will the non-profit governing board meet. If these meetings occur “virtually”, how will the school ensure meaningful public access to comply with North Carolina Open Meetings Law.

Annual Meeting. The annual meeting will be held in the month of June.

Regular Meetings. In compliance with the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), the North Carolina Open Meetings Act, and the North Carolina Open Records Act, the Governing Board may provide for regular meetings to be held at a fixed time and place. Notice of the scheduled meeting will be provided annually to the public as required by law.

Special Meetings. Special meetings of the Governing Board may be held at any time and place for any purpose or purposes, unless otherwise prescribed by FOIA, on the call of the President or Secretary, and will be called by the Secretary on the written request of any two of the directors. Notice to the public will be given 24 hours in advance of such meeting.

Teleconference and Virtual Meetings. Teleconferencing, videoconferencing, or other virtual meetings are permissible for remote officers under the Bylaws and a fixed location where the majority of the officers are present exists.

3. Explain when the governing board members of the proposed virtual charter school first came together to write the actual application. Include information about the selection process for these individuals and who led the selection process.

Bryan Setser, Board President, acted as the Incorporator in November 2011 when the Governing Board began its pursuit of a charter. His involvement has been continuous since that time. He was involved in the writing of the application for this submission. In 2011, the State Board of Education determined that virtual schools would not be considered. Mr. Setser has continued to gather other interested North Carolinians who want to bring this innovative educational option to students in the state. These individuals offer qualifications and skills that will result in an independent and effective Governing Board, as illustrated in Appendix E.

4. Provide assurances that these board members have the qualifications, skills and/or experiences to “decide matters related to the operation of the school, including budgeting, curriculum, and operating procedures.”

The Governing Board members are parents, educators, business and community leaders who are committed to bringing a high-quality, highly accountable virtual public school to North Carolina. The Governing Board currently consists of five members. Each Governing Board member

¹⁸ <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/charterschools/best/governance.pdf>

brings unique skills and expertise to support NCCA and make decisions regarding operations of the school, including budgeting and curriculum. NCCA is a statewide school and as such the Governing Board members have community ties across the state. There is a wide range of expertise on the Governing Board demonstrating the capacity for initial start-up operations and the successful launch of the school for fall 2014.

5. Describe when and how this governing board will evaluate the virtual charter school vendor to gauge progress with meeting the terms of the charter. Specifically, what measurable objectives and standards, included in the contract, the board will utilize to hold the provider accountable. Also, address the protocol for the governing board decision to change vendors and terminate the contract without significant disruption to the charter school's operations.

As outlined in the draft Professional Services Agreement provided in Appendix J, the Governing Board is fully in charge of the contractual relationship with Connections Academy and maintains all oversight and accountability responsibilities. The Governing Board will regularly review services and will set expectations for reporting. Connections Academy is subject to a performance review, conducted at the Governing Board's discretion. The design, performance criteria, and the methodology are developed by the Governing Board in consultation with Connections Academy and Governing Board Counsel, as so desired by the Governing Board.

The Governing Board has the right to terminate its contract with Connections Academy if Connections Academy does not meet its performance obligations and is unable to cure such deficiency after being given reasonable notice. The Professional Services Agreement describes in detail the terms of termination and states that is clearly the prerogative and discretion of the Governing Board. After considerable review and negotiation by the Governing Board and its Counsel, it is anticipated that a Professional Services Agreement will be approved for execution.

6. Share the level of involvement by the governing board in drafting the management agreement with the proposed vendor. Did the board have the authority to add or change the documents (i.e. specifically setting the goals by which the vendor would be held accountable)? Were there any changes based on the board negotiations? If so, please explain.

The Governing Board is actively involved with its counsel in negotiating the Professional Services Agreement or management agreement, as provided in Appendix J.

7. Discuss the schools' grievance process for parents and staff members that will be handled by the nonprofit board of directors.

Parent Grievance Resolution Process - NCCA is committed to ensuring community, parent, and student satisfaction, and takes its responsibilities for the provision of educational services to students very seriously. These 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. NCCA will also ensure the family and student adheres to their responsibilities as stated in the PLCA and the School Handbook, and if necessary, will discipline for violation of policy. If a parent has concerns, he/she may institute Grievance Process in the handbook.

Employee Grievance Resolution Process - The Governing Board encourages 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. The resolution process includes: concerns about the application of school

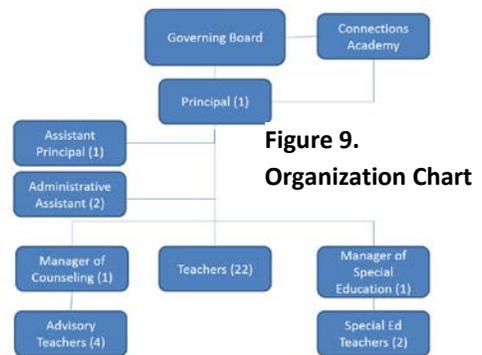
policies and procedures within the school to school staff, parents and students; concerns about personnel decisions directly involving an individual or decisions affecting other individuals at the school; work conditions; questions about the competence and overall fitness of a colleague or a supervisor; and regulatory compliance. The employee may institute the Grievance Process.

Please provide the following in this location of the application.

1. A well-defined organizational chart showing the relationship of the Board to the parents and staff of the proposed charter school. This chart should also include the lines of authority to and from an outside entity that will play a role in managing or supporting the charter school (such as educational service providers, advisory bodies or parent/teacher councils).

****The Organization Chart, including level and quantity of staffing, is predicated on NCCA receiving the requested example funding of \$6,304.57 per student. If the funding level remains at \$3,500 per student, NCCA will not be able to afford this quantity or level of staffing.****

The operating structure of NCCA will be similar to a traditional educational environment, with Principal and other administrators implementing the policies and procedures of the Governing Board while supervising the teaching staff. Figure 9 shows the basic organization and information flow. Connections Academy will employ the Principal; however, selection will be approved by the Governing Board. The Governing Board will employ all other staff including administrative support, teachers and assistant principals.



**Figure 9.
Organization Chart**

2. A description of the governance structure of the proposed charter school, including the governing board’s functions, primary duties, roles and responsibilities, as it relates to overseeing the charter school. Include how the board will recruit, hire, and supervise the lead.

The Governing Board sets policy and hires contractors, including those providing the management, curriculum, technology, personnel, and instructional services. Additionally, the Governing Board will be responsible for assuring that all aspects of the financial and programmatic accountability systems fulfill the charter agreement. The Governing Board will:

- Protect the legal interests of the charter school and set policy.
- Determine the vision/mission of the school and govern the operations of the school.
- Exercise sound legal and ethical practices and policies. 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 North Carolina.
- Manage liabilities wisely and ensure adequate resources and manage them effectively.
- Advocate good external relations with the community, school districts, media, neighbors, parents, and students.
- Hire contractors, negotiate service agreements, and hold contractors accountable for performance under such agreements.
- Comply with state and federal reporting requirements.
- Practice strategic planning and assess the organization’s performance.

The Governing Board also provides a venue for parent involvement. The Governing Board may 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 members of the Governing Board are also encouraged to be involved with the Governing Board's activities. NCCA will make all Governing Board minutes available to families on request and will report on Governing Board activities in the school newsletter.

Upon approval of the charter, the Governing Board will embrace the roles and responsibilities of an effective school board. The founding members may recruit additional members to form a diverse and well balanced Governing Board. The Governing Board will be deemed to be public agents authorized by the State Board of Education to supervise and control the charter school.

*“Effective boards recruit and supervise a lead administrator who can meet the school’s mission and develop and define the roadmap for academic rigor.”*¹⁹ NCCA's instructional leader will be the Principal, who is selected by the Governing Board and serves at its pleasure but is employed and supervised day-to-day by Connections Academy. This person will ideally hold an advanced degree with a minimum of five years teaching experience and some management or administrative experience. A former principal who is technologically literate with good communication skills is ideal. The Principal will 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. The Principal is responsible for the overall school operation working with parents, students, support staff and teachers who virtually facilitate the student instructional program.

The Governing Board has plans to partner with Connections Academy via the Professional Services Agreement to provide human resource services, including recruiting, to ensure NCCA is staffed by well-trained and effective online learning professionals. It is anticipated that the recruiting of the Principal will begin immediately upon charter approval, as the Principal needs to be hired prior to teacher and staff recruitment. The search process will begin with a job posting, advertising for the position through multiple avenues, screening of candidates, and identifying the top candidates for Governing Board consideration. Ideally, the Governing Board anticipates hiring a candidate by April of 2014.

Daily management of the school will be the Principal's responsibility while overall governance is 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 Academy based upon their experience interacting with the Principal and operating other successful virtual school programs nationwide. The Governing Board will adopt pay scales, performance criteria, a performance appraisal system, and disciplinary policies for all employees, including the Principal.

3. Describe the size, current and desired composition, powers, duties or the governing board. Explain how this governance structure and composition will help ensure that a) the school will be an educational and operational success; b) the board will evaluate the success of the school and the school leader; and c) there will be active and effective representation of key stake holders, including parents.

The Governing Board is comprised of no fewer than three and no more than nine voting members serving staggered terms of one, two, or three years. No member of the Governing

¹⁹ <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/charterschools/best/governance.pdf>

Board will be an employee or independent contractor or otherwise be compensated by NCCA except as specifically allowed by the conflict of interest provisions set forth in applicable North Carolina and federal law.

The officers of the corporation include a President, Vice President, Treasurer and Secretary. The Governing Board members are parents, educators, business and community leaders who are committed to bringing a high quality, highly accountable virtual public school for students in grades 6-12 to North Carolina.

4. What kinds of orientation or training will new board members receive, and what kinds of ongoing professional development will existing board members receive? The plan for training and development should include a timetable, specific topics to be addressed, and requirements for participation (Board Policies Draft: Appendix H).

In order to ensure smooth operations and effective board practices, the Governing Board members may elect to participate in the extensive Board Academy training program developed by Connections Academy and conducted by a reputable third party vendor. The program currently includes the Effective Board Governance of Public Charter Schools online training module series as well as state-specific training provided both face-to-face and in print. Training topics include charter school basics, non-profit management, conflict of interest, effective meetings, policy development and human resources oversight. In addition, Governing Board members will have the opportunity to participate in various conferences to network with other charter board members and further their development as effective board members.

5. Describe the board's ethical standards and procedures for identifying and addressing conflicts. Identify any existing relationships that could pose actual or perceived conflicts of interest if the application is approved. Discuss specific steps that the board will take to avoid any actual conflicts of interest and to mitigate any perceived conflicts of interest.

The Governing Board adheres to all applicable laws for non-profit public benefit corporations operating a charter school, including but not limited to the laws regarding interested parties and conflict of interest. In addition, the Governing Board adopts and regularly updates a Conflict of Interest Code under the Political Reform Act. An employee of NCCA or the EMO is not eligible to serve on the Governing Board due to the strict conflict of interest policy.

6. Explain the decision-making processes the board will use to develop school policies.

The operating structure of NCCA will be similar to a traditional educational environment, with a Principal, selected by the Governing Board, who will supervise administrative staff and teachers who implement the curriculum. 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 counsel. The Governing Board will be well informed regarding Charter School Law, State Board Policy, and operating policies established by the School Board of Education and implemented by the Department of Public Instruction. Such knowledge is imperative in order for the Governing Board to make appropriate policy decisions that will affect the operation of the school and the work environment for students and staff.

7. Describe any advisory bodies, councils, or associations (if any) listed in the organization chart or to be formed, including the roles and duties of that body and the reporting structure as it relates to the school's governing body and leadership.

Not applicable.

Include in Appendices

1. A one-page resume from each founding board member and responses to the questions found on the Charter School Board Member Form (Appendix E).
2. The proposed by-laws, which must include a Conflict of Interest Policy for board members and a state commitment to North Carolina Open Meetings Law (Appendix F).
3. A copy of the Articles of Incorporation, if available. If not available, this document **must** be available prior to interview by SBE, the applicant must demonstrate that it has been applied for prior to submission of the proposed application (Appendix G).
4. A copy of any board policies if adopted already (Appendix H).
5. Copies of meeting minutes, if available, relevant to the development of the charter school plan, during the application process (Appendix I).

We provide the requested information in Appendices E-I as directed.

Proposed Management Organization (Educational Management Organization (EMO) or Charter Management Organization (CMO))

Name of EMO/CMO: Connections Academy of North Carolina, LLC

Address: 1001 Fleet Street, 5th Floor, Baltimore, MD 21202

Phone number: (800) 382-6010

Web site: <http://www.connectionsacademy.com>

Fax number: (443) 529-1200

Contact person: Barrie Drum, Senior Director of State Relations

Contact person's e-mail address: bdrum@connectionseducation.com

1. Explain how the contract with the specified EMO or CMO will be in the best educational and financial interest of the charter schools. Please include a copy of the proposed management agreement as Appendix J of the specified EMO or CMO.

The school anticipates engaging Connections Academy of North Carolina, LLC, an affiliate of Connections Education LLC, for curriculum, technology, and other services in compliance with North Carolina statutes. The Governing Board will maintain responsibility for ensuring that NCCA meets all educational, fiscal and programmatic goals outlined in the charter. The Governing Board will regularly review the services and will set expectations for reporting. Under the Professional Services Agreement, Connections Academy will be subject to a performance review, conducted at the Governing Board's discretion. The Governing Board is responsible for determining the appropriate services for the school and ensuring the performance of Connections Academy with its obligations under the Professional Services Agreement as well as ensuring compliance with North Carolina statutes. A copy of the proposed professional services agreement is in Appendix J of this application.

Connections Academy is dedicated to providing high quality professional educational services to children of all backgrounds. Connections Academy can leverage its significant resources to the benefit of the school. This partnership will create a school that is setting new standards of excellence in the virtual school arena. The curriculum brings together best of class materials from leading education publishers and other content providers. With proprietary interactive web

tools, online lesson plans and instruction, internal email, and secure community message boards, Connections Academy's advanced technology allows a quality public education to be delivered straight into student's home or other location. The curriculum allows for parent, student, and teacher input through a five-star ranking system that allows for continuous school improvement.

2. Provide financial data from other schools managed by the management company to demonstrate how this organization is a good fit for the targeted student population.

We provide financial data for two other schools managed by the proposed management company in response to Question #3 in the Virtual Historical Context section.

3. Describe how the governance structure will be affected, if at all, by the EMO/CMO and particularly discuss how the board of directors of the charter school will govern the school independently of the EMO/CMO.

The Governing Board will govern NCCA independently of Connections Academy and maintain responsibility for ensuring that the charter school program meets all educational, fiscal and programmatic goals outlined in the charter. The Governing Board will decide all matters related to the operation of the school, including budgeting, curriculum and operating procedures. The Principal will run the day-to-day operations of the school.

The Governing Board will be the final decision maker in all ultimate employment matters, following the school's Employee Handbook, which the Governing Board will review, revise, and approve. Connections Academy will ensure that all personnel undergo required background checks before they are employed in the school. The Governing Board will approve pay scales, performance criteria, a performance appraisal system, and disciplinary policies for all employees.

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 North Carolina. 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.

An employee of NCCA or Connections Academy is not eligible to serve on the Governing Board. The Governing Board is a completely independent entity from Connections Academy. Upon the filing of a Form 1023 Application for 501(c)3 status, the IRS began a rigorous review of the organization in order to make the decision to award tax exempt status to the charter school corporation. NCCA is not related to nor is it a part of a holding company system, it is a non-profit entity controlled and governed by the Governing Board which does not include, and will never include, an employee or former employee of Connections Academy. By conferring this status to the school, the IRS will validate the independence of the school's corporation.

4. Provide a description of the relationship that will exist between the charter school employees and the management organization.

The operating structure of NCCA will be similar to a traditional educational environment, with a Principal, approved by the Governing Board, who will supervise administrative staff and teachers who implement the curriculum according to the policies and procedures.

Virtual Historical Context

1. The virtual school vendor must discuss its academic and financial track record exclusively within the charter school sector as a whole school provider. Supplemental services and partnerships with district schools should not be a part of this consideration.

During its 10 years of operation, Connections Academy 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. In looking at state standardized tests – Connections Academy students tend to perform above the state in Reading and on par in Science.²⁰ All results are those publicly reported by the states on their standardized tests, not based on any internal measures. Highlights from 2010-2011 and 2011-2012 include:

- Ohio Connections Academy is the only statewide Ohio eSchool rated Excellent in 2010 by the Ohio Department of Education.
- Capistrano Connections Academy (serving southern California) met AYP target with a Growth API of 779 from the California Department of Education in 2011.
- Central California Connections Academy met AYP target with a Growth API of 776 from the California Department of Education in 2011.
- Colorado Connections Academy met the high standards for NCLB’s AYP for the 2006–2007, 2007–2008, 2009–2010, and 2010–2011 school years
- Michigan Connections Academy scored a grade of "A" on Michigan Ed Yes! for the 2011-2012 school year.
- Texas Connections Academy @ Houston ranked 10th of the 168 HISD schools for composite scores of academic growth and 4th in reading in 2011-2012.
- Wisconsin Connections Academy again achieves AYP (for the 7th consecutive year).

Connections Academy-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 since new students generally enter 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.

Each year, a third-party survey of parents with students enrolled in a Connections Academy-affiliated school is conducted. Year after year parents express their satisfaction. This past year alone, more than 52% of families participated in the survey. Results include:

- 91% of parents gave the overall online school program an “A” or “B” grade
- 93% recommend the school to other parents
- 92% of parents reported that their children are making good academic progress
- 96% said they were pleased with the helpfulness of their children’s teachers, and specifically praised their responsiveness and accessibility
- 96% of survey respondents consider the curriculum “high quality”

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.

2. Offer an explanation as to whether the virtual charter school vendor is a for-profit or non-profit entity. A financial history of the vendor should be included in this section. The management agreement with all fees clearly provided should be attached as Appendix J.

Connections Education (formerly known as Connections Academy) is a for-profit entity and was an independent company formed in October 2001 to serve schools and students in the emerging K-12 virtual school market. The company operated in a fiscally-sound manner throughout its history and was able to self-fund its investments in its curriculum, technology, and operations after receiving its initial funding from its founders. In November 2011, the company was acquired by Pearson Education, Inc., a subsidiary of the public company Pearson PLC. As a public company, their financial statements are available online. Being a part of Pearson not only brings Connections Academy an incredible source of curriculum and instruction products and services, but it also provides it with the financial resources to support its growth and the schools and students the company serves.

The Governing Board has reviewed the standard fee schedule from Connections Academy but has yet to engage in negotiations with this vendor to finalize the specific services they will provide and the exact rates they will charge, so a schedule of negotiated fees is not available at this time. The Governing Board is confident that the budget information contained in this application has been prepared in a conservative fashion and incorporates the expected expense for all products and services necessary to operate a high quality virtual school.

3. Discuss the academic and financial performance data of two virtual charter schools (from two different states) that are run by this particular vendor. This review must include a comparison of these virtual schools against district and charter schools performance on their state’s chosen assessments. Further, a comparison of student demographics, teacher to student ratios, and staff/student turnover rates must also be incorporated into this analysis.

We include Connections Academy’s publically reported state test results for 2011-2012 for Oregon Connections Academy (ORCA) and South Carolina Connections Academy (SCCA) compared to statewide reported results for all public schools in those states. The number of students tested is the sum of students tested across grade levels; for Connections Academy, the % Proficiency is a weighted average of student Proficiency at each grade level with the weights based on the numbers of tested students.

Figure 10. Reading/ELA State Test Proficiency (Reported Values)

State	N Tested	% Proficiency	State % Proficiency	Exceeds Statewide in Grades	Equivalent in Grades	Behind In Grades
Oregon	1,674	77.7%	71.9%	5,6,7,11	4 & 8	3
South Carolina	1,680	72.4%	71.9%	6 & 7	3,4,5,8, 2 nd Year HS	None

Figure 11. Math State Test Proficiency (Reported Values)

State	C N Tested	% Proficiency	State % Proficiency	Exceeds Statewide in Grades	Equivalent in Grades	Behind In Grades
Oregon	1656	59.0%	63.1%	6	4,5,11	3,7,8
South Carolina	1677	55.8%	70.7%	None	None	3,4,5,6,7,8, 2 nd Year HS

Figure 12. Science State Test Proficiency (Reported Values)

State	N Tested	% Proficiency	State % Proficiency	Exceeds Statewide in Grades	Equivalent in Grades	Behind In Grades
Oregon	826	72.4%	66.3%	5 & 11	8	None
South Carolina	945	64.4%	70.4%	None	3 and 5	4,6,7,8

Figure 13. Writing State Test Proficiency (Reported Values)

State	N Tested	% Proficiency	State % Proficiency	Exceeds Statewide in Grades	Equivalent in Grades	Behind In Grades
Oregon*	317	65.0%	66.7%	NA	NA	NA
South Carolina	568	68.0%	73.8%	None	8	5

* Grade 11 only

Figure 14. Student Turnover Rate

	Students Enrolled as of 10.1.11	% of Students Enrolled on Last Day
ORCA	2870	77.4%
SCCA	2803	77.3%

(Defined as continuous enrollment from 10.1.11 through the last day of the school year).

Figure 15. Reenrollment rate for 2012-2013

	Students Enrolled on Last day 2011-2012	% of Students Re-enrolled for 2012-2013
ORCA	2,823	75.1%
SCCA	2,700	74.9%

(Defined as the % of students enrolled on the last day of school who enrolled for 2012-2013).

Figure 16. Student Demographics

	Students Tested	% FARM-eligible	% Minority	% IEP
ORCA*	1,327	47.9%	20.0%	11.1%
SCCA**	1,680	48.2%	22.7%	11.2%

*Based on tested student counts for OAKS Reading (Grades 3-8)

**Based on tested student counts for PASS Language Arts (Grades 3-8) & HSAP Reading (2nd Year High School)

For the 2011–2012 school year, ORCA had a teacher turnover rate (voluntary terminations) of 5.5% and SCCA had a rate of 7%.

Both schools have operated in a fiscally prudent manner such that funding received exceeded expenditures incurred. In addition, ORCA has undergone seven independent annual financial audits and SCCA has undergone four independent annual financial audits with both receiving unqualified audit opinions every time. An unqualified audit opinion is the highest opinion that can be received from an independent accounting firm.

4. Name the highest and lowest performing virtual charter schools in this vendor's total portfolio. Analyze why those schools are performing at their specified levels on the state assessments. Include strategies or steps taken to either improve or sustain academic levels.

Classifying a school as having high or low performance requires additional direction on the parameters of the measurement. Accurately analyzing a school requires considering multiple variables (results of state proficiency assessments, academic performance, cultural and social environment, parent and student feedback, etc.). These variables and the weight or importance of each variable changes from state to state. Since most Connections Academy-affiliated schools are statewide virtual schools (with only one statewide virtual school per state), it is difficult to compare schools to each other. Students in their schools take different state proficiency tests and are graded on different scales and measures.

5. The applicant must discuss, in depth, why this particular vendor was selected. Include a list of what other vendors were considered, the academic data examined, sample management fees from other potential vendors, summaries of the governing board discussions.

The Governing Board conducted due diligence in evaluating the need for an Education Service Provider. The Governing Board selected Connections Academy for their solid national reputation working with charter schools, school districts, and state departments of education across the country. The Governing Board was also impressed with Connections Academy's fiscal responsibility and experience developing fiscally-responsible and sustainable best practices. The Governing Board considered other vendors, namely K12 and Edison/ Provost, but felt that with Connections Academy's proven record of success, it was the best fit.

While at NCVPS, Bryan Setser, Board President, worked with multiple vendors. He has spent the past two years researching potential partners. His most positive interactions were with Connections Academy based on their responsiveness and ability to provide information and data upon request. The Governing Board compared academic performance, educational programs, management teams, parent satisfaction results, corporate growth and culture, national reputations, and other factors in looking at the feasibility of partnering with each vendor. Fee schedules from each vendor were not available in the initial due diligence phase of the Board's review. Each board member had the opportunity to provide other board members with his or her independent findings throughout the process before the Board made a unified decision.

Connections Academy 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. Connections Academy will be a critical partner in achieving the school's mission to help each student maximize his/her potential and meet high performance standards through a uniquely individualized learning program for students in grades 6-12 throughout North Carolina who need an alternative to the traditional classroom.

Projected Staff

Provide, as Appendix K, a list of positions anticipated for the charter school (e.g., principal or director, finance officer, administrative support staff, teachers (part-time/full-time)), paraprofessional/teaching assistants, clerical, and maintenance). Be mindful that your predicted administration and staff match the projected enrollment noted in Section I and align with the proposed budget.

We provide a list of positions for projected staff in Appendix K.

Staffing Plans, Hiring, and Management

Include the following information for the proposed charter school:

1. Explain the board's strategy for recruiting and retaining high-performing teachers. List the qualifications needed for the staff to deliver online instruction and how the school will ensure staff meets these requirements.

**** The level of staffing and quantity of staffing is predicated on NCCA receiving the requested example funding of \$6,304.57 per student. If the funding level remains at \$3,500 per student, NCCA will not be able to afford this quantity or level of staffing.****

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. In partnering with Connections Academy, 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 Academy's professional development will provide them with the necessary skills and pedagogy to teach online and maximize their skill set statewide.

2. Provide a description of the relationship that will exist between the charter school employees and the non-profit board. Provide as Appendix L, a draft of employment policies to be implemented by the proposed charter school.

The operating structure of NCCA will be similar to a traditional educational environment, with a Principal, approved by the Governing Board, who will supervise administrative staff and teachers who implement the curriculum according to the policies and procedures. The Principal will be responsible for implementing board policies in the day-to-day operation of the school and will act in an 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 counsel.

NCCA will 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 the organization's core values. We provide a draft of employment policies as Appendix L.

3. Discuss how the board will ensure that the student to teacher ratio will not compromise the academic offerings of the proposed charter school?

****Should NCCA receive the requested example funding of \$6,304.57 per student, the school will be staffed with an anticipated student to teacher ratio of 38:1. However, if the funding level remains at \$3,500 per student, the student to teacher ratio will exceed 50:1.****

Online learning allows for a flexible staffing plan that can grow, retract, or expand with the enrollment of the school and is not limited by facility space. Since 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.

4. Outline the board's procedures for hiring and dismissing school personnel, including conducting criminal background checks.

NCCA will develop personnel policies and procedures regarding the hiring and termination of employees as well as the use of criminal background checks for applicants and employees.

Offers of employment are contingent upon satisfactory reference and background checks as well as receipt of valid certification documents and fingerprint clearances as required or any other approvals as listed in the offer letter. NCCA reserves the right to conduct additional background checks periodically during employment. Employment may be denied or terminated if NCCA believes the result of any of the background checks performed would affect an individual's ability to do his or her job and/or the safety of the workplace or customers. We provide additional information on employment policies in Appendix L.

5. Outline the school's proposed salary range, employment benefits, and any merit-based bonuses for all levels of employment.

For teaching positions, a salary range will be determined based on research of market compensation and financial considerations at the time of posting. After the initial hire, compensation increases and incentives are based on performance. The budgets in Section V provide estimated salaries by position. Teachers may receive an annual salary increase based on performance ratings. Teachers can apply for career ladder opportunities and assume additional responsibilities in order to earn additional compensation (Coordinator Teacher – base plus 4%, Lead Teacher – base plus 9%, Master Teacher – base plus 15%).

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

For 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. The budgets in Section V provide estimated salaries by position. School administrative employees may be eligible for a bonus incentive. Bonuses are based on individual and school performance.

6. Identify any positions that will have dual responsibilities (within or without the organization) and the funding source for each position.

This is not applicable.

7. Describe the plans to have qualified staffing adequate for the anticipated special needs population, means for providing qualified staffing for ELL and gifted students.

NCCA will employ a Manager of Special Education, two Special Education teachers, and Manager of Counseling and four Advisory Teachers. All staff will be qualified and certificated as required. We provide a list of positions for projected staff in Appendix K.

****This level and quantity of staffing is predicated on NCCA receiving the requested example funding of \$6,304.57 per student. If the funding level remains at \$3,500 per student, NCCA will not be able to afford this quantity or level of staffing.****

8. Provide a narrative detailing the roles and responsibilities, qualifications, and appropriate licenses that each position must have to be hired by the non-profit organization and effectively perform the job function(s).

We provide a list of positions for projected staff in Appendix K.

Staff Evaluation and Professional Development

1. Identify the positions responsible for maintaining teacher licensure requirements and professional development.

All employees hired into certificated positions will be responsible for maintaining licensure and will be required to fulfill any professional development mandated by North Carolina to maintain the validity of their license.

2. Provide a detailed plan noting how the school will mentor, retain, and evaluate staff in a format that matches the school's mission, educational program, and meet the teacher certification and licensure requirements for teachers as prescribed by state law and No Child Left Behind. Be sure this overview matched with the projected staff and funding of the proposed budget section.

The Governing Board anticipates contracting with Connections Academy for purposes of recruiting staff. Connections Academy 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 Academy national website, Career Builder, NorthCarolina.Jobing.com, and NorthCarolinaJobs.com. Job fairs will be attended throughout the state. Even though the Governing Board has plans to retain Connections Academy for staff recruitment, the Governing Board will be responsible for approving positions.

Teacher will be evaluated by the Principal along with feedback solicited from families. Instructional staff will be observed on a regular basis and evaluated using a comprehensive, multi-layered system. The teacher evaluation system may include the following and will be aligned to North Carolina teacher evaluation systems:

- Parent surveys, which may rate such things as the responsiveness, effectiveness, knowledge, and skills of their assigned teacher(s)
- Principal evaluations from observations of Learning Coach/student interaction, including LiveLesson sessions, and review of correspondence
- Peer reviews evaluating the degree of cooperation, support and sharing of knowledge
- Aggregate performance of enrolled students based on a value-added improvement model and documents by data from Connexus
- 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 North Carolina administrator evaluation systems:

- Parent surveys, rating the responsiveness, effectiveness, and instructional expertise
- 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 Principal will be evaluated by the Governing Board with data and may be assisted by consultative functions provided by Connections Academy. 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.

3. Discuss the core components of professional development plan and how these components will support effective implementation of the educational program. Discuss the extent to which professional development will be conducted internally or externally and will be individualized and uniform.

The teachers at NCCA will benefit from ongoing and effective professional growth including 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 Academy 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 on becoming experts in virtual learning.

Teacher professional development is considered critically important in ensuring that the staff is optimally effective in teaching in a virtual environment and addressing the Common Core State Standards in their daily instructional practice. NCCA will use the National Standards for Quality Online Teaching published by the International Association for K-12 Online Learning (iNACOL)²¹ and the Core Standards for Facilitating Student Learning at Connections Academy, as guides for pinpointing necessary teacher skills and professional development requirements.

NCCA has plans to engage Connections Academy 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. NCCA will provide its teachers with a comprehensive teacher training and professional development program to equip them with the following:

- A working knowledge of the NCCA curriculum and Common Core State Standards
- Strategies and best practices for virtual learning and instruction
- How to monitor student progress and assign tiered-supplemental instructional support programs based on that data
- How to differentiate instruction
- How to utilize and navigate the tools of Connexus
- How to develop Personalized Learning Plans (PLP)
- 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

Initial Teacher Orientation Course: All teachers (and the Principal) will complete a self-guided teacher-training course. This course will be delivered through Connexus, and contain lessons, assessments, and links to online tutorials. The focus of this course is to prepare teachers for teaching in a Connections Academy affiliated-school, and it covers 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 higher.

²¹ National Standards for Quality Online Teaching, iNACOL, www.inacol.org, <http://www.inacol.org/resources/nationalstandards/NACOL%20Standards%20Quality%20Online%20Teaching.pdf>

The NCCA Interactive Program Manual: The NCCA 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, 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.

Supplemental Teacher Training Course Segments: Once the school is open, NCCA 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.

Professional Development Sessions: Connections Academy 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. Teachers are required to attend monthly sessions virtually on topics such as: implementing specific instructional strategies, current curriculum-specific 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 forth.

Graduate Course in Online Learning: Connections Academy has collaborated with Boise State University to create a series of graduate level courses in teaching in an online environment.

Professional Learning Community Resource (PLCr): In addition to school-based Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), each teacher has access to a robust online PLCr portal in Connexus, which lists 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.”

Weekly Teacher Updates: The Connections Academy 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.

4. Provide a schedule and explanation of professional development that will take place prior to school opening. Explain what will be covered during this induction period and how teachers will be prepared to deliver any unique or particularly challenging aspects of the curriculum.

School staff members typically work together for two weeks prior to school opening. During that time, teachers engage in online, self-paced training; on-site training and professional development; school-leader-led training; and school-year preparation. Teachers complete four online, self-paced courses and participate in face-to-face, interactive training:

1. The **Teacher Orientation Course** familiarizes teachers with the essential knowledge, vocabulary, and skills needed to teach online through Connexus.

2. **Students in Distress: Recognizing and Responding** informs teachers about the risk factors, signs, and symptoms of child abuse and neglect and guides them in creating a personalized reference guide on specific definitions and reporting requirements to ensure student safety.
3. **Internet Safety**, also completed by students and their Learning Coaches, is an i-SAFE course that informs teachers about the various threats, challenges, and safety protocols needed to work and learn online.
4. **Exploring Your Courses** guides teachers in the curriculum, instructional resources, and assessments used to guide, monitor, motivate, and intervene to ensure student learning.

The face-to-face, interactive training and professional development that occurs before the start of school includes reviewing, discussing, and activities on:

- The Core Standards for Facilitating Student Learning, which are the essential values, vision, and protocols through which teachers and school leaders work together.
- School Year Cycle, the flow of the online school year, including the key milestones used to guide, monitor, and assess student learning (e.g., Welcome Call, PLP discussions, Curriculum-Based Assessments).
- Navigating Connexus, including practice with lessons, assessments, grading, evaluating student learning, providing feedback, customizing students' programs, and recording (logging) contacts, conversations, and instructional interventions via demonstration student, teacher, and Learning Coach accounts.
- School-based PLC work, including building collaboration within and across grade levels.
- Ensuring teachers are prepared to have a student-centered, successful first-day, first-week, and first-month of school.

5. Describe the expected number of days/hours for professional development throughout the school year, and explain how the school's calendar, daily schedule, and staffing structure accommodate this plan.

A typical professional development plan for a Connections Academy-affiliated school includes a minimum of four hours of professional development per week (two hours on each of two days per week). Early in the week, teachers and administrators meet together with trainers and instructional specialists to review school-wide data and discuss successes, challenges, and needed action items. Teachers then meet again later in the week in PLCs to address successes and challenges specific to their grade bands, subject areas, and students. Professional Development sessions are scheduled throughout the school year to enhance teachers' understanding of student data and the instructional interventions appropriate to specific learning challenges. These sessions are usually an hour in length and provide opportunities for teachers to collaborate about topics of instructional importance directly related to the success of their students. Professional development hours can be earned for attending these sessions and submitting an artifact showing proof that some portion of the session's learning was actually implemented with students and details in the form of a reflection as to its success and next steps.

Enrollment and Marketing:

Reaching the full capacity for enrollment will be critical to obtain the necessary financial resources. In addition, it is required by law that charter schools provide equal access to all students.

Marketing Plan

Provide a plan indicating how the school will market to potential students and parents in order to reasonably reflect the racial/ethnic and demographic composition of the district in which the charter school will be located or of the special population the school seeks to serve: (G.S. 115C-238-29F(g)(5)).

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. NCCA has an active base of interested families that have already reached out, without any direct contact, to the Connections Academy website seeking additional information about the school. Upon approval of the charter, NCCA will actively recruit families that represent the full cultural, demographic and socioeconomic range of North Carolina.

Direct mail: NCCA will conduct direct mail campaigns announcing the charter school to families with children throughout North Carolina. In a typical mailing, a postcard will be sent out inviting parents to attend an Information Session, visit the website, and/or contact the call center. NCCA may also use electronic mail to supplement or replace its physical mail campaign.

Information sessions: NCCA will conduct multiple Information Sessions across North Carolina to assure that families from a variety of communities are able to attend. Information sessions may be virtual and families may attend the session from home via their computers. NCCA will 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 Academy will create and maintain a website with a special link to NCCA. The website will contain information about NCCA, its approach, its curriculum, and FAQs 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: NCCA will launch and maintain a toll-free information line and an email information service to answer parents' questions.

Community and youth services partnerships: As part of its outreach process NCCA 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: NCCA will make use of paid media, primarily advertisements in local newspapers and radio service announcements.

Referrals/word of mouth: As NCCA grows, it anticipates that an increasing number of families who come to the school will enroll due to 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: NCCA will be linked to leading Internet search engines with local reference capability to help North Carolina families looking for a virtual school option to find this high-quality charter school. In addition, NCCA benefits from Facebook, Twitter, and other social media outreach conducted by parent advocates.

Parent and Community Involvement

1. List the strategies the virtual school will implement to involve parents and the community regularly in their child's education. Detail any required or optional meetings scheduled to occur throughout the academic year (i.e. open houses or school community meetings).

At least one parent will have a seat on the Governing Board. Parent members benefit from intensive training geared toward making them effective representatives of parent interests. Parent Board members are encouraged to seek officer positions. Parents may serve on ad hoc groups convened by the Governing Board to focus on particular issues such as community partnerships and neighborhood outreach. The volunteer parent Community Coordinators develop a vibrant and active school community. 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.

On a daily basis, NCCA parents express their opinions about school matters large and small. Through the five-star StarTrack lesson rating system, they can rate and comment upon every lesson in the curriculum and their entire school experience. Principals often conduct informal surveys and call for feedback via WebMail. NCCA 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. 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. NCCA 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 students have multiple opportunities to benefit.

2. Define how the virtual charter school will facilitate student attendance at any in-person school activities. If parents indicate that transportation is an issue, describe how the school ensures students can attend.

Students at NCCA 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.

3. Expound upon procedures for parents to contact the virtual school faculty, administration, or governing board with concerns of any nature. Further, depict the school's process for promptly addressing the identified issues.

Please see our previous response to Question #1 in this section.

4. Describe how the virtual charter school instructional and administrative staff will communicate with non-English speaking students, parents, and guardians.

Under State Board of Education policy, a home language survey will be administered for every student at the time of enrollment. NCCA will evaluate the results of each survey and determine what assistance is in order to ensure that the student will have access to the educational program.

Admissions Policy

Provide the school's policies and procedures for admitting students to the school, including:

1. Tentative dates for application period, enrollment deadlines, and procedures.

NCCA will be open to all students statewide on a space available basis and will not discriminate in its admission policies or practices on the basis of intellectual or athletic ability, measures of achievement or aptitude, status as a handicapped person, proficiency in the English language, or any other basis that would be illegal if used by a school district as stated in GS 115C-238.29F(g)(5). Enrollment opens on March 1 of the preceding school year and will remain open.

Connections Academy-affiliated schools typically reflect the statewide racial and ethnic balance, and NCCA will actively work to do the same. Through extensive community outreach and full disclosure about the school's program, NCCA will attract those students and families who are most committed to student success in a virtual school setting. NCCA will utilize a broad-reaching student recruitment effort, thereby ensuring outreach to families with a wide variety of racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. In addition, NCCA may focus on certain subgroups for extra recruitment efforts in order to achieve a pool of potential students that reflects a balanced student population. Partnerships and outreach efforts using a variety of community and youth organizations may aid in this process.

As a public school, NCCA will not charge tuition. Outreach communications will inform families that the school is tuition-free. As a public school, NCCA will be non-sectarian in its programs, admission policies, employment practices and all other operations. Admission to the school will not be determined according to the place of residence of any pupil, or his or her parent or guardian, within North Carolina.

2. Clear policies and procedures detailing the open enrollment lottery plan including policies regarding statutory permitted student enrollment preferences.

As a virtual school, NCCA is not subject to the same facility space restrictions that a brick-and-mortar school might face in accommodating as many students as may wish to attend. Should the number of applicants exceed the enrollment levels during the initial enrollment period, NCCA will conduct a lottery that is in keeping with state and federal guidelines.

The lottery will provide for a random selection process by which all applicants who have completed all enrollment tasks by a specified, publicly-announced deadline are given an equal chance of being admitted. NCCA will give preference to students who were enrolled in the school in the prior year (once enrolled, students will not be required to reapply); and siblings of students presently enrolled. Students will be enrolled on a first come/first served basis. 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 were completed. Connexus automatically assigns a waitlist time/date stamp to all students.

3. Policies and procedures for student waiting lists, withdrawals, re-enrollment, and transfers.

To comply with mandated enrollment caps, state regulations and reporting, and/or testing processes and requirements, the school 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 Principal the authority to define and implement these temporary hold periods.

Projected Enrollment 2014-2015 through 2016-2017

In the following tables, please list for each year and grade level, the numbers of students that the school reasonably expects to enroll. In addition, please indicate any plans to increase the grade levels offered by the school over time and be sure these figures match those on the initial cover page.

The numbers in the following tables are projections, or estimates, and do not bind the State to fund the school at any particular level.

Identify all LEAs from which students will probably come. If more than 3 are expected, a separate sheet explaining those projections must be included in the appendices and fully explained in the budget narrative.

NCCA will operate as a statewide school, open to all students in the state. We have included potential enrollment figures for three counties. In addition, we provide our anticipated enrollment for the total of the rest of the LEAs in the state.

LEA 1: Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools

LEA 2: Guilford County Schools

LEA 3: Wake County Public School System

	2014-2015				2015-2016				2016-2017			
	LEA 1	LEA 2	LEA 3	Other LEAs	LEA 1	LEA 2	LEA 3	Other LEAs	LEA 1	LEA 2	LEA 3	Other LEAs
6	35	7	17	82	50	11	28	125	71	21	39	225
7	35	7	18	82	50	11	28	125	71	21	39	225
8	36	7	18	82	50	11	28	125	71	21	39	225
9	36	7	18	82	50	11	29	125	71	21	39	225
10	36	7	18	82	50	11	29	125	72	22	39	225
11	36	7	18	82	50	10	29	125	72	22	40	225
12	36	8	18	83	50	10	29	125	72	22	40	225
Total	250	50	125	575	350	75	200	875	500	150	275	1,575

Transportation Plan & Lunch Plan

Describe in detail the transportation plan that will ensure that no child is denied access to the school due to lack of transportation. The details of this plan should align with the Mission, identified need for the charter school, targeted student population, and the budget proposal. If field trips or regional centers are utilized for synchronous education, how will the virtual charter assist students that do not have transportation?

This is not applicable in an online environment.

Civil Liability and Insurance (G.S. 115C-238.29(F)(c)):

The charter school will obtain and maintain insurance at a minimum in the following amounts:

1. Errors and omissions: one million dollars (\$1,000,000) per claim.
2. General liability: one million dollars (\$1,000,000) per occurrence.
3. Boiler and machinery: the replacement cost of the building.
4. Real and personal property: the appraised value of the building and contents.
5. Fidelity bonds: no less than two hundred fifty thousand dollars (\$250,000) to cover employee dishonesty.
6. Automobile liability: one million dollars (\$1,000,000) per occurrence.
7. Workers’ compensation: as specified by Chapter 97 of the General Statutes.

The applicant must provide a quote from an insurance providers part of this application (as Appendix M) to demonstrate levels of insurance coverage and projected cost.

Areas of Proposed Coverage	Proposed Amount of Coverage	Cost (Quote)
Comprehensive General Liability	\$1,000,000- \$2,000,000	2014 = \$1,040 2015 = \$1,606 2016 = \$2,757
Officers and Directors/Errors and Omissions	\$1,000,000	2014 = \$597 2015 = \$922 2016 = \$1,582
Property Insurance	\$100,000	2014 = \$100 2015 = \$100 2016 = \$100
Motor Vehicle Liability	\$1,000,000	2014 = \$400 2015 = \$400 2016 = \$400
Bonding Minimum/Maximum Amount	\$250,000	2014 = \$1,496 2015 = \$1,496 2016 = \$1,496
Other – D&O Liability	\$1,000,000	2014 = \$784 2015 = \$784 2016 = \$784
Total Cost		2014 = \$4,417 2015 = \$5,308 2016 = \$7,119

Health and Safety Requirements

1. Discuss the data retention and confidentiality procedures for the virtual school. In the event of a catastrophe, explain the data protection and data recovery systems.

Access to student information and data at NCCA is controlled by a central team of administrators, trained in FERPA, using a complex system of roles, permissions, and locations. Only users in a particular location who have the permissions at that location are permitted to access student data that is permissioned using roles and locations. Data points and reports are assigned to roles. Access to the reports and all student data is controlled by these roles. Only users in a location with the correct roles can meet the requirements to access the data.

All data that is accessed via Connexus is done through forced SSL for privacy and security purposes. Private data transmitted between systems for data reporting purposes is always done with secure FTP or over a private VPN that provides encryption. To ensure that valuable data is available when needed but protected from misuse, Connexus utilizes disk-to-disk backups for fast restore. The disk backup is then saved to DLT multi-drive tape backup libraries for off-site storage. On a bi-weekly basis, the backup tapes are removed for secure off-site storage.

Connexus is available 24/7 except for regularly scheduled weekly maintenance. The network employs a modular, scalable design that provides multiple levels of security, redundancy, and failover. Backup Exec is provided from Symantec Corp. Multiple infrastructure security components ensure protection from viruses and hackers.

2. Provide the virtual charter school's Acceptable Use Policy.

Connections Academy has an extensive Terms of Use document that governs Connexus and its users for terms, conditions, and notices. The agreement applies to users of Connexus and all materials, information, software, content, products, and services that are owned or licensed by Connections Education LLC and included in, or available through, Connexus as well as any content owned or licensed by a third party content provider that is included in, or available through Connexus with that third party's permission.

3. Describe the health and safety standards adopted by the school for both online and offline student activities.

NCCA takes student safety and well-being seriously. Students should be able to learn in a safe and comfortable environment. NCCA requires two courses focus on safety.

Internet Safety – this course provides information about practicing safe behaviors online.

Students in Distress: Recognizing and Responding – this course is designed to ensure teachers and other school staff are familiar with the signs of student distress and to know how to respond promptly and professionally when they observe such signs or behaviors.

All members of school staff must complete the trainings at the beginning of the school year, and then refer to the trainings throughout the year as needed. School leadership tracks staff completion of trainings to ensure all staff members have completed them in a timely manner.

Learning Coaches are asked to communicate collaborate with teachers and other school staff as the school staff members work to fulfill their professional roles in supporting student safety and well-being. They are asked to involve additional parties as appropriate to address concerns, and to always keep student safety and well-being at the center of the conversation.

Connections Academy provides families with Internet safety training. Connections Academy computers have an application installed that enables automatic blocking of adult, phishing, and identity theft sites via DNS filtering. Modified browser security settings limit potential malicious activity; CyberSitter can be installed upon request, and computers have an anti-virus/malware tool installed. Tech Support can assist families with installing similar programs.

All public charter schools are required to follow the regulations regarding health and safety as state in G.S. 115C-238.29F(a).

We, the Board Members at North Carolina for Quality Virtual Education, Inc. d.b.a. North Carolina Connections Academy will develop a written safety plan and policies to be shared with staff, parents, and students, and be available upon inspection from the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction and local Health Departments.

_____ 2/26/13
Board President's Signature Date

Facility:

Note: The SBE may approve a charter school prior to the school's obtaining a facility; however, students may not attend school and no funds will be allocated until the school has obtained a valid Certificate of Occupancy for Educational use to the Office of Charter Schools.

1. Identify the steps the board will take to acquire a facility.

NCCA will lease permanent office space for administrative and teaching staff, to serve as a teaching center where administrative and teaching staff will work. It 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.

NCCA will analyze locations, including any potential shared/joint use facilities, based upon criteria needed to run an effective virtual school. Since a facility will not be needed until early fall 2014, it is premature to perform a detailed analysis of facilities as available rental properties will be significantly different in several months. Online education requires minimal build out and can be accomplished in the timeframe needed. Criteria used to analyze facilities include:

- 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 computer network.
- The school estimates approximately 125 square feet per staff person (estimated space of 5,500 square feet total) 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 meets all local minimum Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards.
- Office has ample parking accommodations.
- Office is available to move-in within three to six months from the date of search.
- Office is comprised of approximately 20% office space and 80% open area for cubicles.

2. Identify the steps the board will take to obtain the required Certificate of Occupancy for Educational use.

NCCA will take the necessary steps to secure the Certificate of Occupancy. Students will be present in the school headquarters only on the rare drop-in basis, and will not gather there for instructional activities.

If a facility has been identified, please fill out the Facility Form (Appendix N).

We have not identified a facility yet. We will do so within the requirements of the charter.

Facility Contingency Plan:

Describe the method of finding a facility if the one the board has identified will not be ready by the time the public charter school will be opening. Include information regarding the immediate spatial needs of the school and identify any programs that will not be immediately offered because a permanent facility has yet to open.

The flexible teaching model allows teachers to educate students remotely, from the primary teaching center, from multiple teaching centers, or from a temporary location. This maximizes expansion and contraction potential and eliminates the need for excessive, under-utilized space. Teachers working remotely provides more local services, the ability to conduct local field trips and info sessions, allows more personalized support and assistance, local representation, and the ability to assist in state testing efforts. Allowing teachers to work from remote locations can also make it easier to hire the best teachers and locate critical teaching resources.

Students will be present in the school headquarters only on the rare drop-in basis, and will not gather there for instructional activities.

V. Financial Plan

In the following sections present a detailed description of assumptions and revenue estimates, including but not limited to the basis for revenue projections, staffing levels, and costs. The narrative should specifically address the degree to which the budget will rely on variable income. See <http://ncpublicschools.org/fbs/stats/index.html> (Or click on Agency Website: Division of Financial Services, Reports and Statistics, Statistical Data. The formula for calculating these allotments can be found in the Resource Guide.

****Per TCS-U-015, NCCA will receive the same rate as a full-year course in the NC Virtual Public School, without the benefit of local funds, for eight courses per student (estimated at \$3,500 per student per year). While this funding level is appropriate for students taking part-time virtual classes, it is not sustainable for a fiscally- and educationally-sound, full-time virtual school. A similar funding model to the brick-and-mortar charter schools which combines both state and local funding, however, would allow for a sustainable and fiscally- and educationally-responsible school. Therefore, where applicable in this application, we identify our response as only being viable if the funding is increased to a similar model. To provide an example, we describe NCCA operations throughout the application based on the Durham County state allocation provided in the Resource Manual (\$4,554.57) plus a very conservative local funding amount (\$1,750.00), totaling \$6,304.57 per student per year.****

Budget: Revenue Projections from each LEA 2014-2015 through 2016-2017

LEA 1 Name and Code: Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools – LEA Code 600

		2014-2015		2015-2016		2016-2017	
Revenue	\$ per Pupil	Projected LEA ADM	Projected LEA Revenue	Projected LEA ADM	Projected LEA Revenue	Projected LEA ADM	Projected LEA Revenue
State Funds	4,438	250	1,109,600	350	1,553,440	500	2,219,200
Local Funds	2,410	250	602,500	350	843,500	500	1,205,000
Federal EC Funds	3,743	30	112,304	42	157,226	60	224,609
Totals			1,824,404		2,554,166		3,648,809

LEA 2 Name and Code: Guilford County Schools - LEA Code 410

		2014-2015		2015-2016		2016-2017	
Revenue	\$ per Pupil	Projected LEA ADM	Projected LEA Revenue	Projected LEA ADM	Projected LEA Revenue	Projected LEA ADM	Projected LEA Revenue
State Funds	4,552	50	227,612	75	341,417	150	682,835
Local Funds	2,426	50	121,300	75	181,950	150	363,900
Federal EC Funds	3,571	6	21,425	9	32,138	18	64,275
Totals			370,337		555,505		1,111,010

LEA 3 Name and Code: Wake County Public School System - LEA Code 920

		2014-2015		2015-2016		2016-2017	
Revenue	\$ per Pupil	Projected LEA ADM	Projected LEA Revenue	Projected LEA ADM	Projected LEA Revenue	Projected LEA ADM	Projected LEA Revenue
State Funds	4,434	125	554,285	200	886,856	275	1,219,427
Local Funds	2,096	125	262,000	200	419,200	275	576,400
Federal EC Funds	3,743	15	56,152	24	89,844	33	123,535
Totals			872,437		1,395,900		1,919,362

LEA 4 Name and Code: All Other LEAs

		2014-2015		2015-2016		2016-2017	
Revenue	\$ per Pupil	Projected LEA ADM	Projected LEA Revenue	Projected LEA ADM	Projected LEA Revenue	Projected LEA ADM	Projected LEA Revenue
State Funds	5,188	575	2,983,100	875	4,539,500	1,575	8,171,100
Local Funds	1,750	575	1,006,250	875	1,531,250	1,575	2,756,250
Federal EC Funds	3,556	69	245,375	105	373,397	189	672,114
Totals			4,234,725		6,444,147		11,599,464

Total Budget: Revenue Projections 2014-2015 through 2016-2017

Income: Revenue Projections	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017
State ADM Funds	4,554,570	6,831,855	11,386,425
Local Per Pupil Funds	1,750,000	2,625,000	4,375,000
Exceptional Children Federal Funds	449,218	673,826	1,123,044
Other Funds*			
Working Capital*			
Total Income	\$ 6,753,787.60	\$ 10,130,681.40	\$ 16,884,469.00

*If the applicant is depending on other funding sources or working capital to balance the operating budget, please provide documentation such as signed statements from donors, foundations, bank statements, etc., on availability of these funds. Assurances are needed to guarantee these additional sources of revenue are available. Please include these in Appendix P.

Personnel Budget: Expenditure Projections 2014-2015 through 2016-2017

This personnel list may be amended to meet the needs of the charter school. This list should align with the projected staff located in the Operations Plan (Appendix K). Applicants may amend this table and the position titles to fit their Education and Operations Plans.

Budget Expenditure Projections Personnel	2014-2015			2015-2016			2016-2017		
	# Staff	Salary Per	Total Salary	# Staff	Salary Per	Total Salary	# Staff	Salary Per	Total Salary
Personnel:									
Principal	1.00	\$ 80,000.00	\$ 80,000.00	1.00	\$ 80,000.00	\$ 80,000.00	1.00	\$ 80,000.00	\$ 80,000.00
Assistant Principal(s)	1.00	65,000.00	65,000.00	2.00	65,000.00	130,000.00	3.00	65,000.00	195,000.00
Administrative Assistant(s)	2.00	31,200.00	62,400.00	3.00	31,200.00	93,600.00	5.00	31,200.00	156,000.00
Manager of Special Education	1.00	60,000.00	60,000.00	1.00	60,000.00	60,000.00	1.00	60,000.00	60,000.00
Manager of Counseling	1.00	55,000.00	55,000.00	1.00	55,000.00	55,000.00	1.00	55,000.00	55,000.00
Teacher(s)	22.00	38,000.00	836,000.00	33.00	38,000.00	1,254,000.00	55.00	38,000.00	2,090,000.00
Special Education Teacher(s)	2.00	38,000.00	76,000.00	3.00	38,000.00	114,000.00	6.00	38,000.00	228,000.00
Advisory Teacher(s)	4.00	35,000.00	140,000.00	6.00	35,000.00	210,000.00	10.00	35,000.00	350,000.00
Incentive Compensation			29,870.00			87,280.00			119,950.00
Total Personnel	34		\$ 1,404,270.00	50		\$ 2,083,880.00	82		\$ 3,333,950.00
Benefits:	# Staff	Cost per	Total	# Staff	Cost per	Total	# Staff	Cost per	Total
Health/Dental//Life Insurance, Retirement Plan and other benefits			\$ 252,768.60			\$ 375,098.40			\$ 600,111.00
Medicare			20,361.92			30,216.26			48,342.28
Social Security			87,064.74			129,200.56			206,704.90
Other Payroll Taxes			18,957.65			28,132.38			45,008.33
Total Benefits	0		\$ 379,152.90	0		\$ 562,647.60	0		\$ 900,166.50
Total Personnel Budget	34		\$ 1,783,422.90	50		\$ 2,646,527.60	82		\$ 4,234,116.50

Operations Budget: Expenditures Projections 2014-2015 through 2016-2017

Budget Operations Expenditure Projections		2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017
Instructional	Tangible and Intangible Materials	1,505,000	2,257,500	3,762,500
	Curriculum Supplies	14,000	21,000	35,500
	Supplemental Curriculum	0	0	200,000
	Testing & Assessment	55,000	85,000	110,000
	Educational Resource Center	126,000	189,000	315,000
	Special Education Services	606,832	910,248	1,517,080
Technology	Student Technology Assistance	558,087	837,130	1,395,216
	Student Internet Subsidy	119,241	178,861	298,102
	Staff Hardware/Software	20,400	30,000	49,200
	Instructional Software	600,000	900,000	1,500,000
	Technology Support & Repairs	150,000	225,000	375,000
Staff	Human Resources Support	42,500	62,500	102,500
	Staff Recruitment	15,000	15,000	15,000
	Staff Training/Professional Development	15,000	22,500	35,000
	Travel & Conferences	50,000	75,000	125,000
Operational	Enrollment and Records Management	56,000	84,000	140,000
	Office Supplies	20,000	30,000	50,000
	Postage	54,200	81,300	135,500
	Copier/Reproduction	5,000	7,500	12,500
Facilities	Facility Lease	93,500	93,500	93,500
	Utilities	16,500	16,500	16,500
	Maintenance & Support	15,000	15,000	15,000
	Phone	15,000	17,500	20,000
	High Speed Internet	25,000	25,000	25,000
Student Acquisition	Marketing Services	63,046	94,569	157,614
	Community Outreach	75,000	250,000	500,000
Business Services	Accounting & Regulatory Reporting	50,000	75,000	125,000
	Bookkeeping & Audit Services	40,000	40,000	40,000
	Treasury Services	94,569	141,853	236,421
	Bank Fees	600	600	600
Other	School Management Services	409,797	614,696	1,024,493
	Legal Counsel	5,000	5,000	5,000
	D&O Insurance	1,500	1,500	1,500
	Dues	5,000	5,000	5,000
	Accreditation	10,000	0	0
Total Operations		\$ 4,931,770	\$ 7,407,256	\$ 12,438,726

Overall Budget:

Budget Operations Expenditure Projections	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017
Total Expenditures (Personnel)	\$1,783,422.90	\$2,646,527.60	\$4,234,116.50
Total Expenditures (Operations)	\$4,931,770.41	\$ 7,407,255.61	\$12,438,726.02
Total Expenditures	\$ 6,715,193.31	\$10,053,783.21	\$16,672,842.52
Total Revenue	\$6,753,787.60	\$10,130,681.40	\$16,884,469.00
Annual Net Projections	\$38,594.29	\$76,898.19	\$211,626.48

Budget Narrative:

The Governing Board will develop an annual budget and analyze cash flow needs carefully.

Fiscal year: The fiscal year for NCCA will be July 1 through June 30.

Budget highlights and assumptions: The budgets for 2014-2015 and beyond demonstrate a school with sound financial planning.

Revenue Projections: Funding has been based on conservative estimates of available pupil funding from several sources and conservative enrollment estimates.

State ADM Funds: Per the Resource Manual, the state allocates dollars per child depending on the county or city school system in which the charter school is located. The state allocation of \$4,554.57 for Durham County was utilized for this budget.

Local Per Pupil Funds: Since local dollars vary by each student’s LEA of residence and the charter school allocation differs by LEA, a conservative estimate of \$1,750 per ADM was utilized for the budget.

Exceptional Children Federal Funds: The school expects that approximately 12% of students will be eligible for an IEP or 504 plan. Per Resource Manual guidance, an allotment of \$3,743.48 was used for each student that is expected to be counted in the Exceptional Children Headcount.

Personnel Budget: A key component of the mission of NCCA is a high quality teaching staff. Teachers are budgeted based on the staffing ratios that have been found to be effective in other similar schools. The personnel budget assumes the requested example funding of \$6,304.57 per ADM and provides for student to teacher ratio (on an FTE basis) of 38:1. Benefit expenses are assumed to be approximately 27% of wages. Substitute teachers are usually not required in the virtual environment, as the staff of the school can typically cover when a colleague is absent. NCCA does intend, however, to identify some substitute teaching resources to address longer-term absences if needed.

Operating Budget: Assumptions are based upon reasonable estimates of anticipated expenses for a virtual school of this size and the budget is aligned to the mission and performance goals.

Please include additional information that showcases all assumptions for your budgetary calculations:

1. Describe the systems and process by which the school will manage accounting, purchasing, payroll, and audits. Specify any administrative services expected to be contracted for the school, and describe the criteria and procedures for the selection of contractors.

NCCA plans to contract the operations of the school to an education service provider, Connections Academy of North Carolina, LLC, a subsidiary of Connections Education. Connections Academy will provide human resources services including recruiting, payroll, (including, but not limited to, paying the teaching staff directly, and collecting and remitting taxes), benefits administration, supervision and liability insurance.

Connections Academy will be responsible for providing to the Governing Board treasury and accounting reports as are required by law, regulation, or the charter, including a report of budgeted and actual expenses, and will assist in providing any information required by the SBE or its auditors. No later than the earlier of June 1 or 14 working days prior to any deadline specified in the charter, Connections Academy agrees that it will present to NCCA a balanced budget (i.e., not resulting in a cumulative net asset deficit) for the following fiscal year.

NCCA will follow a financial and accounting plan that is compliant with generally accepted accounting principles (GAAP) and will provide an accurate accounting of all of its finances, ensure sufficient information for audit purposes, and provide data in the format needed for accurate and timely annual financial reports.

- Developing NCCA's annual budget will be an iterative process incorporating input from key stakeholders every step of the way. A preliminary budget based on initial assumptions will be approved by the Governing Board before the start of the school year. Once the beginning enrollment and updated per-pupil funding figures are known, a revised budget is prepared. This budget will then be compared to actual and forecasted results on a monthly basis.
- NCCA will use industry-standard accounting software to ensure proper bookkeeping and will institute rigorous internal financial controls as follows.
 - NCCA 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 adopted budget and sign the check request form.
 - To ensure fiscal responsibility and compliance, the Governing Board will meet regularly to review the operations and financial performance of the school. Supporting documentation is required for all expenditures.
 - NCCA 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.
- Each month, a set of detailed financial statements will be produced that include a revenue and expense statement, a balance sheet, bank reconciliations, invoice detail, payroll registers, any grant fund expenditures, cash receipts from all sources, and a transaction listing of all activity.

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 meeting and will serve as the vehicle to authorize future expenditures, along with the adopted budget and other policies.

2. Also, in narrative format, explain how your spending priorities align with the school's mission, curricular offerings, transportation plans, and professional development needs. Be able to depict in chart format and discuss in narrative how the school will maintain a small, contingency reserve and operate using sound fiscal practices. As you construct the budget, include any and all documentation about cash on hand, bonds, real estate, or grants as part of this application package.

The Governing Board will exercise autonomy over its budget and expenditures by ensuring best-practice fiscal controls. At the same time, NCCA will benefit from deficit protection provided by Connections Academy through service credits, which serve as an as-needed in-kind contribution. The school may be required to repay these service credits if adequate funds become available to do so.

3. Indicate the amount and sources of funds, property, or other resources expected to be available through banks, lending institutions, corporations, foundations, grants, etc. Note which are secured and which are anticipated, and include the evidence of commitment for any funds on which the school's core operation depends.

Connections Academy will provide technical assistance, including grant-writing support, to pursue and secure grant funds to cover NCCA's start-up and early implementation costs. For any start-up and early implementation expenses that are not covered by grant funds, Connections Academy will provide an interest-free advance to the school. NCCA will repay these funds when it has the resources to do so. Evidence of commitment is provided in Appendix P.

4. Discuss the school's contingency plan to meet financial needs if anticipated revenues are not received or are lower than estimated. What is the school's break-even student enrollment figure for each of the first five years?

NCCA intends to utilize Connections Academy as its pay agent for fixed expenses such as those related to payroll and the facility. These costs will be invoiced monthly by Connections Academy. The Governing Board will review and approve these invoices prior to reimbursing Connections Academy and payment will only be made when NCCA has available funds.

For many of the services that will be provided by Connections Academy, NCCA anticipates contracting 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 lower than estimated revenue due to an enrollment shortfall. Payments to Connections Academy will only be made when the school has available funds.

If it is determined that the school will not be able to meet its financial obligations to Connections Academy as a result of revenue coming in lower than expected, Connections Academy will provide "service credits" (discounts on products and services) as an in-kind grant contribution to protect NCCA against a deficit.

5. Discuss the year one cash flow contingency in the event that revenue projections are not met in advance of opening.

Connections Academy will provide technical assistance, including grant-writing support, to pursue and secure grant funds to cover NCCA's start-up and early implementation costs. For

any start-up and early implementation expenses that are not covered by grant funds, Connections Academy will provide an interest-free advance to the school. NCCA will repay these funds when it has the resources to do so.

6. In describing your budgetary assumptions, explain the analysis utilized to project these specific enrollment figures. If your budget projections are lower than anticipated, how will the school adjust this budget and what is the determined break-even point for student enrollment?

The enrollment projections are conservative based upon the demand in North Carolina for full-time virtual education and the experience that similar schools have had in other states. In the event that the school does not reach its enrollment projections, NCCA will implement a policy of carefully hiring staff only as enrollment requires. 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 flexibility and the ability to make wise financial decisions while ensuring students' academic needs are successfully met.

NCCA anticipates contracting for services from Connections Academy 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.

NCCA will 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.

Financial Audits:

Describe the procedure and method for conducting an independent financial audit for the proposed charter school.

Once NCCA's charter is approved by the SBE, the Governing Board will enter into a contract with an independent auditor approved by the North Carolina Local Government Commission to conduct an audit. The annual audit will be completed and filed with the GCC and Department of Public Instruction by October 31, beginning with October 31 after the first year of operations. The audit will be conducted in accordance with Governmental Auditing Standards and will meet the specific compliance requirements set forth by North Carolina.

Provide the name of the firm approved by the North Carolina Local Government Commission (LGC) that will conduct the audit. Include the complete mailing address, telephone number, and fax number. If a firm has yet to be identified, please list the firms investigated.

No firms have been investigated at this time. The Governing Board will solicit proposals from several approved firms before selecting one to perform audits.

VI. LEA Impact Statement

Pursuant to G.S. 115C-238.29B(d) and SBE Policy TCS-U-015, the charter school applicant must submit a copy of the application to the LEA in which the school will be located and all other LEAs that are proposed to be served by the virtual charter school. The applicant must submit their application to the LEA within seven (7) days so that proof of submission can be included in the complete application packet. The LEA may then submit information or comment directly to the Office of Charter Schools for consideration by the State Board of Education.

NCCA is both emailing all 115 superintendents throughout North Carolina and also sending a hard copy via FEDEX within seven days of Friday March 1, 2013.

Signature Page

The foregoing application is submitted on behalf of North Carolina for Quality Virtual Education, Inc. d.b.a. North Carolina Connections Academy. The undersigned has read the application and hereby declares that the information contains in it is true and accurate to the best of his/her information and belief. The undersigned further represents that the applicant has read the Charter School Law and agrees to be governed by it, other applicable laws, and SBE regulations.

Name: Bryan Setser

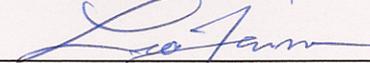
Position: Board President

Signature:  _____

Date: 2/26/13 _____

Sworn to and subscribed before me this

26th Day of February, 2013.



Notary Public Official Seal



My commission expires: 10/10, 2013