



## **NORTH CAROLINA VIRTUAL PILOT APPLICATION**

# **North Carolina Connections Academy**

**Public charter schools opening the fall of 2016**

**Due by 5:00 pm EST, September 26, 2014**

North Carolina Department of Public Instruction  
NCDPI/Office of Charter Schools  
301 N. Wilmington Street  
Raleigh NC 27601-2825  
919-807-3491

Mailing Address:  
6303 Mail Service Center  
Raleigh, NC 27699-6303

## **CHARTER SCHOOL**

### **2015 Application Process**

**To open a charter school in the 2016-2017 school year**

#### **APPLICATION DUE DATE/TIME**

**September 26, 2014** A complete **online** application package, in the Office of Charter Schools **by 5:00 pm EST.**

**\*Non-Refundable \$1000 Application fee due to the Office of Charter Schools\***

*Application Fee Payment Details can be found on the Office of Charter Schools Website*

#### **APPLICATION SPECIFICATIONS**

Applicants can submit applications prior to the deadline September 26, 2014 at 5:00 pm EST. **All applications must be submitted using the online portal** and applicants are to use the following specifications:

1. All required Appendices should be clearly titled, include page numbers (i.e. Appendix A and page numbers as- A1, A2, B1...), and submitted in the appropriate places within the application.
2. **Any** answer given within the application which is not original to the applicant, the applicant must provide a citation to the source of the answer.
3. Review all elements of your application for completeness before submitting. **An incomplete application will result in the elimination of the application.**
4. **Any** document attached to the application or within the online system **must be** in PDF format.
5. Late submissions **will not** be accepted. No exceptions.

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

I. APPLICATION CONTACT INFORMATION.....4

II. MISSION and PURPOSES.....6

*Mission:*.....6

    Purposes of the Proposed Charter School:.....9

    Goals for the Proposed Charter School:.....10

III. EDUCATION PLAN.....14

*Instructional Program:*.....14

    Virtual Platform Delivery:.....15

    Whole Child Development.....37

    Special Services.....50

IV. GOVERNANCE and CAPACITY.....56

*Governance:*.....56

    Governance and Organizational Structure of Private Non-Profit Organization:.....56

    Operational Components.....56

    Proposed Management Organization (Educational Management Organization or Charter Management Organization).....63

    Private School Conversions:.....

    Charter School Replication:.....

    Virtual Historical Context.....67

    Projected Staff:.....72

    Enrollment and Marketing:.....80

V. OPERATIONS.....87

*Transportation Plan:*.....87

    School Lunch Plan:.....

    Civil Liability and Insurance.....88

    Health and Safety Requirements:.....89

    Facility:.....90

VI. FINANCIAL PLAN.....

*Budget: Revenue Projections from each LEA 2016-17*.....93

    Total Budget: Revenue Projections 2016-17 through 2020-2021.....94

    Total Budget: Revenue Projections 2016-17 through 2018-2019.....

    Personnel Budget: Expenditure Projections 2016-17 through 2020-2021.....95

    Personnel Budget: Expenditure Projections 2016-17 through 2018-2019.....

    Operations Budget: Expenditure Projections 2016-17 through 2020-2021.....96

    Operations Budget: Expenditure Projections 2016-17 through 2018-2019.....

    Overall Budget:.....97

    Overall Budget:.....

    Budget Narrative:.....

    Financial Compliance:.....102

VII. AGREEMENT PAGE.....

*Application Fee:*104

    Applicant Signature:\_\_\_104

## I. APPLICATION CONTACT INFORMATION

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 Educa*

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 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 Alternative telephone: 301-442-3790

E-Mail address: *bryan@2revolutions.net*

Name of county and local education agency (LEA) in which charter school will reside:

County: DURHAM

LEA: 320-Durham Public Schools

Was this application prepared with the assistance of a third party person or group?

No:

Yes:

If so, provide the name of the third party person or group. *Connections Education*

List the fee provided to the third party person or group. \$0 - no fees

Provide a **full** detailed response of the assistance provided by the third party person or group while preparing this application and when the assistance will end.

The Governing Board reviewed, edited, and approved the application. Connections Education provided assistance inputting the application into the online system. The Board has partnered with Connections Education for several years to develop this charter application. It is similar to and replicates language from our previously submitted applications. In addition, language from this application is similar to language used by other public charter schools that partnered with Connections Education during the application process and are currently serving students in their respective states. The Board plans to partner with Connections Education throughout the application process and afterwards as agreed upon through the Educational Products & Services Agreement (executed and signed and provided in Appendix L).

### **Grade Levels Served and Total Student Enrollment:**

Projected School Opening: Year 2015

Month August

Will this school operate on a year round schedule?

No:

Yes:

Proposed Grade Levels Served and Total Student Enrollment (4 Years)

Academic School Year	Grade Levels	Total Projected Student Enrollment
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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, that the initial board members and I were regularly involved in the development of this application, and that no part of this application is plagiarized. All information contained herein is complete and accurate. I realize that any misrepresentation will result in disqualification from the application process or revocation after award. I understand that incomplete applications will 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 non-profit organization.

\_\_\_\_\_

Bryan Setser, Governing Board President

Signature

Title

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Printed Name

Date

## II. MISSION and PURPOSES

(No more than three total pages in this section)

### **Mission:**

*State the Mission of the proposed charter school in **thirty-five 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:*

The mission of North Carolina Connections Academy (NCCA) is to empower children with knowledge, skills, and character traits to be successful in their education through an engaging, personalized learning experience in a full-time virtual school.

*Clearly describe the mission of the proposed charter school:*

NCCA will serve students who want or need a full-time virtual educational environment for a variety of reasons. NCCA will provide students with a Personalized Learning Plan (PLP) unique to their needs and goals, which will include both an academic and non-academic focus. Some students will enroll for a finite period of time and return to their previous schools; others will flourish in the full-time environment and stay enrolled as long as is feasible for their family.

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

- 1. Provide a detailed description of the proposed Targeted population. In your description include how this will reflect the racial and ethnic composition of the school system in which you proposed to be located. Clearly outline the rationale for selecting the location and targeted population.*

\*The Board has partnered with Connections for several years to develop this charter application. This application includes language that is similar to language used in previously submitted applications, including a 2013 application recommended for approval by the NC Charter School Advisory Board. Additionally, language used in this application is similar to language used in charter school applications by other schools supported by Connections across the nation that are currently serving students.\*

NCCA proposed to operate a statewide K-12 virtual school enrolling students in grades K-9 the first year, adding a grade level each year. The student body will reflect the racial and ethnic composition of the state. The school will address a growing demand by families looking for a personalized education and a more flexible schedule. This is substantiated by the dramatic growth of virtual charter schools across the country. The most recent available figures count 310,000 students attending fully online schools in the 2012-2013 school year. Thirty states plus Washington DC have full-time online schools operating statewide in the 2013-2014 school year (<http://kpk12.com/states/>). Online and blended learning opportunities are

now offered in all 50 states, at least for some students (Keeping Pace with K-12 Online Learning 2012, Evergreen Consulting; [www.kpk12.com](http://www.kpk12.com)). While brick-and-mortar schools reach students within their physical proximity, a high-quality virtual school can leverage excellent teachers and curriculum to meet the needs of students anywhere in the area served who need a virtual school option.

In the 2014 parent survey conducted by Connections, parents with children enrolled in a full-time virtual school supported by Connections stated the following as their top reason for considering virtual schooling:

- \* 45% wanted a change from their current school setting (and in a related finding, 50% of first-year parents agreed with the statement, "I have a child who does not learn well in a traditional school.")
- \* 44% needed or wanted a flexible schedule
- \* 35% expressed a desire for a safe learning environment
- \* 26% desired to have a greater involvement in their child's education
- \* 14% enrolled for student health issues
- \* 10% reported a child bullied in his/her previous school
- \* 5% stated their student was pursuing arts or athletics

Of the students who attend schools supported by our partner, over 48.3% met the federal free and reduced meals (FARM) guidelines mirroring the national average of 48.1% ([http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d12/tables/dt12\\_046.asp](http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d12/tables/dt12_046.asp)). According to the Department of Public Instruction's Free and Reduced Lunch Report for the most recent year available, 56% of enrolled students met the federal income guidelines for 2012-2013 (<http://www.ncpublicschools.org/fbs/resources/data/>). We anticipate that NCCA families will be similar to the state average and will include many of modest means as well as single-parent/dual-working-parent households.

NCCA also anticipates serving a population of students with disabilities similar in size to other public schools in North Carolina. North Carolina reported 184,424 students with disabilities in the 2012-2013 school year (<http://apps.schools.nc.gov/pls/apex/f?p=1:14:1279585925320502::NO::>). It is anticipated that 12% of students at NCCA will be students with disabilities.

Although the school will be reaching students statewide who need or desire another educational option, the teaching/learning center will be located in the Raleigh/Durham or Cary vicinity. To increase accessibility to this school to those students who may need or desire it, and because it is anticipated that there will be a low number of students from any one LEA who choose to enroll, the Board has chosen to serve students statewide.

2. *In the appendices (Appendix A1), 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).*
3. *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 provides a full-time school experience which includes more than courses. NCCA will offer full-time instruction to students in elementary

grades, something not available through NCVPS. Each high school student will have a progression plan focused on career and college readiness. Beginning in 9th grade, guidance counselors work with each student individually on graduation plans with a focus on courses, credits, and post-secondary planning. Students also participate in clubs, activities, and electives to complete the full school experience. NCCA will reach students who need a flexible schedule and for whom a cutting-edge virtual approach provides the best pathway to successful completion of their educational program. 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, families, teachers, and the community. NCCA will provide students 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. NCCA is not a course program; it is a whole-school experience with academic, behavioral, emotional, and career supports found in public school and not offered by NCVPS.

The whole-school experience offered by NCCA includes connections with other students, one of the most important parts of a great academic experience. Through Connections, NCCA will offer over 25 clubs and activities such as chess, robotics, poetry, art, and environment. Students enrolled in schools supported by Connections will expand their educational horizons while interacting with local students in North Carolina, as well as with students across the country.

NCCA will serve students who want or need a full-time virtual educational environment for a variety of reasons. Some life circumstances experienced by students cannot be accommodated or remedied by a district program working with NCVPS. Students who want a more flexible learning environment or have special talents they want to pursue will find a full-time virtual school attractive. Students undergoing medical treatment may need a full-time education comparable to other local public schools using the same academic standards and assessments. Students who have been bullied or subjected to unwanted social pressures may find a full-time virtual school highly desirable for a period of time. Some students will enroll in a full-time virtual school because they seek a more rigorous and challenging curriculum than prior schooling. Students who have not been successful in their current educational environment may enroll in a full-time virtual school to gain ground on their peers. Some of these students will enroll for a finite period of time and then return to their previous schools; others will choose to stay enrolled as long as is feasible for their family.

Some full-time district programs offered to students using NCVPS have requirements that students may not meet due to their particular life situation. For example, in Charlotte-Mecklenburg (<http://schools.cms.k12.nc.us/plcHS/Pages/e-Learning.aspx>), a student must meet the following qualifications:

- \* Be a current CMS student, rising Junior or Senior (student not in CMS will need to enroll at their home school first)
- \* Have passing grades on all prior EOC tests
- \* Have passed all previous online classes with a grade of "C" or better
- \* Have a 2.5 unweighted GPA or higher
- \* Be on track for cohort graduation



If the student meets these qualifications, they are required to apply, submit their transcripts, and attend an interview to be allowed to take classes online. A full-time virtual public charter school option will allow these students direct access to the school of their choice that best meets their needs.

**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 GS 115C-238.29A, and the proposed school's operations.*

*The Six Legislative 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. Improving student learning.*
- 5. Increasing learning opportunities for all students, with a special emphasis on at-risk or gifted students.*
- 6. Encourage the use of different and innovative teaching methods.*

While NCCA will achieve all six legislative purposes, it will uniquely specialize in three: providing parents and students with expanded public school choices, increasing learning opportunities for all students, and encouraging the use of different and innovative teaching methods.

3. NCCA will expand choices for educational opportunities for parents and students across North Carolina by offering a statewide full-time virtual program. In addition to a full-time program with high-quality curriculum for students, NCCA will provide students who succeed the opportunity to continue from elementary school to middle school to high school graduation without interruption, utilizing a consistent, personalized approach. NCCA will provide a quality education choice for families who need a more flexible schedule or a more personalized pathway for student success.

5. NCCA will increase learning opportunities for all students, especially those who are at risk, gifted, or need a specialized focus with lessons and resources personalized for their specific needs. NCCA will achieve this through the unique features of an online setting and our personalized approach to each student's education. Without the typical classroom constraints of space and schedules, students will be placed in the appropriate courses (for example, foundational math, honors English, Advanced Placement(R) courses) based on individual need. The personalized learning approach benefits both struggling students and high achievers. The placement process ensures 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 other caring adult designated by the parents) to ensure a steady flow of appropriate activities for students working below and/or above grade level. In a virtual environment, students are able to work below or above grade level without the fear of ostracism or other negative social repercussions that students sometimes face in a more traditional, site-based school setting.

6. NCCA's unique educational program encourages the use of different and innovative teaching methods 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 that promote student engagement and learning include synchronous LiveLesson(TM) sessions and interactive Teachlet(TM) tutorials. In LiveLesson sessions, teachers share their screen, create break-out groups, and instruct using whiteboards, group chats, and more. In math, proprietary interactive web tools for instruction include a virtual pan balance, a 2-D and 3-D shape program, geoboards, spring scales, digital scales, and work pads. In science, students use a virtual rocks and minerals kit developed with Johns Hopkins University, a chemical reactions program, and virtual dissections. Teachers will use Connexus(R) to carefully monitor each student's progress through the curriculum and to individualize the program to maximize each student's performance.

NCCA will be responsible for student scores on all required state assessments as mandated by North Carolina's NCLB flexibility waiver (approved May 29, 2012) and will ensure student achievement and maintain a high level of accountability.

The use of technology allows for an individualized instruction and competency-based evaluation, thus improving the education process. Teachers will track student progress through Connexus, identifying problem areas quickly and allowing them to put a plan in place to correct learning deficiencies in a timely manner. In a virtual setting, students master skills at their own pace with guidance, direct instruction, and support from full-time certified teachers.

Learning is demonstrated through ongoing and meaningful assessments that drive learning for the individual student.

### **Goals for the Proposed Charter School:**

- 1. Provide specific and measurable goals for the proposed school for the four years of the pilot outlining expectations for the proposed school's operations, academics, finance, and governance. Address how often, who, and when the information will be communicated to the governing board and other stakeholders.*

#### Academic Success Expectations

NCCA is committed to achieving the highest performing level it can within the state's A-F School Report Card system. However, the Board expects the first one to three years to be the time for school administrators and teachers to focus on opening the school, understanding the particular needs of the enrolled students, and adjusting the school's curriculum, instruction, and interventions to best address those needs. The school's

academic goals will be, first and foremost, those that serve the state accountability system. Given that state accountability goals may evolve as state and federal requirements evolve, the school's annual focus will be on the following goals, which will serve as useful proxies for the state accountability system. The importance of these focused objectives within the school will be reinforced, in part, by tying staff evaluation and compensation decisions to them.

**Officially Reported State Test Results:** All official published state test proficiency rates for the school will meet or exceed the state average by Year 4: 0.85 in Year 1, 0.90 in Year 2, 0.95 in Year 3, and 1.00 in Year 4. The calculation is a ratio of the school's result to the state average for each tested subject-grade level. Each ratio is capped at 1.00 and a weighted average is computed based on the number of tests taken by students at the school and officially counted. If an official pass rate and number of students' tests counted is not available for a subject-grade level test, one will be computed using data loaded into Connexus.

**Academic Growth:** 80% of returning students' (enrolled for state testing last school year and this school year or otherwise stated as full academic year students) state test scores will indicate proficiency or better, or will show improvement of at least one category in 4th through 8th grade Reading and Math (e.g., from "Level 2" to "Level 3"). Reading and Math will be calculated separately and averaged.

**Promotion:** 85% of full academic year students will promote to the next grade (K-8) or earn at least one fourth of the required High School credits for a standard diploma in the school year (grades 9-12 as those grades are added to the school). This will be assessed as of the end of the school year compared with the beginning of the school year.

#### Finance, Operations, and Governance Expectations

NCCA focus goals will emphasize student achievement and will be used to award performance bonuses to school staff. In addition, the school will have basic operational goals of improved performance on the state's accountability system; being fiscally, legally, and operationally responsible; and attracting, retaining, and satisfying parents, students, and teachers.

Schools will be financially healthy as reported in the Annual Fiscal and Independent Audit reports. Metrics: No material audit findings and a positive fund balance.

The school will retain qualified, effective teachers. Metric: 90% retention rate for teachers rated proficient or better.

School community will be positive and strong as shown by parents expressing satisfaction on the annual independent survey. Metric: School's positive responses on the questions on the Parent Satisfaction Survey that are most directly affected by the school will average 80% or higher.

NCCA will be economically sustainable. Metric: Each year, NCCA will operate in a fiscally sound manner as measured by an external audit that is submitted on time to DPI. NCCA will meet all Generally Accepted Accounting

Principles (GAAP) as demonstrated by external, annual audit reports. NCCA will meet all financial reporting deadlines set by DPI.

NCCA will adhere to the same accountability measures, administer the same assessments, and follow the same proficiency measures as all public charter schools in North Carolina, in addition to using its own internal assessment tools.

*2. How will the governing board know that the proposed public charter school is working toward attaining their mission statement?*

Student academic success will be monitored and evaluated by all stakeholders: parents, students, teachers, administrators, and the Governing Board. Strong accountability metrics and a high quality curriculum will help ensure the North Carolina Essential State Standards are implemented with fidelity. Comprehensive but appropriate data collection and analysis will be used to design and implement student supports and interventions. NCCA will use Connexus, described in the section for Virtual Platform Delivery, to collect and analyze data. To increase transparency and accountability, the school's performance will be measured and communicated to parents and reported monthly by the Governing Board.

Additionally, the Governing Board will be responsible for ensuring that all aspects of the financial and programmatic accountability systems meet the obligations to the Office of Charter Schools, DPI, and SBE. Plans for monitoring and reporting on the effectiveness of curriculum, instructional methods, and practices include:

- \* Student Learning: The Board will hold the school faculty, staff, and its support partner accountable for student learning. Examples of student learning outcomes include measurable learning gains, performance on the standardized tests, and meeting or exceeding North Carolina's Annual Measurable Objectives (AMO).

- \* Stakeholder Feedback: The Board will take into account and hold the school responsible for implementing constructive and actionable stakeholder feedback, including feedback received from parents and students via StarTrack. This integrated rating system allows every student (along with every teacher and Learning Coach) to rate each lesson from one star (low) to five stars (high) and give comments. Ratings are used by curriculum staff to identify areas of strength as measured by student learning outcomes, as well as areas in need of improvement. This same tool is also used to measure the school's success. The StarTrack system will be fully embraced by students, teachers, and the school's leadership as a dynamic means to provide real-time feedback on the quality of the curriculum and the school.

- \* Parent Satisfaction: The Board is focused on parent satisfaction. Parents enroll students in virtual schools for a variety of reasons. NCCA will measure parental satisfaction and use the data to improve the school. 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 Board. The school will aim for at least 90% of families agreeing that the curriculum is high quality and that they are satisfied with the educational program and instruction.

- \* School Growth. NCCA has a responsible plan for school growth (balancing the desire to serve as many students as possible each academic year with the quality and academic focus of the school) that positions both the students and NCCA for future success. NCCA hopes to responsibly grow from 1,500

students (Year 1) to up to 2,592 (Year 4) through a combination of parent outreach, comparatively high student retention rates (virtual school retention rates tend to be lower than brick-and-mortar schools), and word-of-mouth recommendations and referrals by current NCCA families. NCCA will start by serving students in grades K-9, adding a grade level each year until it is serving students in grades K-12 (Year 4).

\* Compliance with State and Federal Laws: The Board will ensure NCCA is compliant with all applicable state and federal laws regarding public education, specifically charter schools and SBE policies. This compliance will include the timely and accurate reporting of required state data.

\* Fiscal Accountability: The Board is fully committed to fiscal accountability, including cost control, responsible growth, and regular audits.

### III. EDUCATION PLAN

(No more than ten total pages in this section)

**NOTE:** *All sections of the Education Plan should align with all other sections of this application. The State Board of Education shall 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 will 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.

The Board has selected to partner with Connections Education, an organization with substantial resources for curriculum development and instructional support. The curriculum will be aligned to the North Carolina Essential Standards. Curriculum development is guided by iNACOL standards for quality online courses.

These definitions describe the unique terminology and major instructional methods and assessment strategies.

\* **Assessment Objective Performance Reports (AOPR):** These reports will provide real-time student performance data on essential skills and standards based upon individual math, language arts, and science assessment items. Data can be sorted to identify students who have or have not mastered specific objectives and teachers may then use embedded resources to differentiate their instruction.

\* **Curriculum Based Assessments:** The program will use curriculum-based assessments (CBAs) as an effective way to gather additional information on students' understanding of concepts. Diagnostic curriculum-based assessments (DCBAs) pinpoint strengths and weaknesses in student mastery of concepts, and verification curriculum-based assessments (VCBAs) gauge authentic student learning of concepts previously graded as successfully completed.

\* **Intervention Indicators:** Intervention Indicators are displayed on the Teacher Home Page to facilitate teachers' ability to identify which of their students may be in need of an instructional intervention. These indicators are data-driven codes and are the first phase of a multi-phase initiative to facilitate teachers' abilities to ensure that all students learn at high levels of achievement.

\* **Longitudinal Evaluation of Academic Progress (LEAP):** Students in grades K-8 take the LEAP, a technology-facilitated pre-, mid-, and post-test. LEAP provides essential diagnostic information for developing and planning instruction.

\* **Learning Coach:** A parent, extended family member, or similarly qualified adult designated by the parents/guardian as a Learning Coach with the student to support the instruction delivered by certified teacher.

\* **LiveLesson(R) Session:** A real-time web conferencing tool, LiveLesson sessions allow teachers to work synchronously with individuals or groups of students, using voice-over IP, chat, electronic whiteboard, and shared web surfing based on Adobe(R) Connect(TM).

\* **Multi-tiered Intervention:** Consistent with the North Carolina Responsiveness to Instruction Framework, NCCA will employ a multi-tiered

intervention model so every student has access to the resources they need to be successful: Tier I Core Instructional Program, Tier II Supplemental Programs and Supports, and Tier III Alternative Programs. The Student Support and IEP Teams will meet regularly to develop intervention plans and implement strategies to address student needs and maximize growth for all.

\* Personalized Performance Learning(TM) (PPL): This instructional process creates a unique learning experience for each student. During enrollment, Academic Placement Advisors and School Counselors will review students' past records and performance to properly place them in courses. A Personalized Learning Plan (PLP) will then be developed collaboratively by the teacher, Learning Coach, and student to maximize achievement and to tailor curriculum and instruction. Throughout the year, teachers will monitor students' progress and adjust their learning programs to focus on areas where students need to improve and areas in which they can build on their strengths.

\*SSTAIR(TM): This instructional model deeply links curriculum, standards, assessments, and interventions that have direct impact on student mastery and resulting standardized test performance. The Skills Standards, Assessment, Intervention, and Response (SSTAIR) instructional model deeply links curriculum, standards, assessments, and interventions that directly impact student mastery and resulting standardized test performance.

### **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?*

NCCA has engaged Connections Academy of North Carolina, LLC (a wholly-owned subsidiary of Connections) for curriculum, technology, and other services in compliance with North Carolina statute. As part of this engagement, Connections will provide 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 the school 24/7/365 from any Internet connection.

Utilizing Connexus, school administrators and teachers will integrate key functions and services that are critical to maximizing the online academic experience and performance of enrolled students. Administrators, teachers, students, and families will have personalized access to Connexus through a NCCA-branded registration page, login page, and Connexus menu bar. Connexus allows teachers, students, and parents to:

- \* View schedules
- \* Access all lesson assessments
- \* Monitor progress in real time through a grade book
- \* Receive messages through secure WebMail
- \* Communicate with one another through WebMail messages and message boards
- \* Provide ratings and written feedback about lessons, Connexus features, and the school

Connexus is the platform for facilitating the educational environment. This

proprietary, web-based software delivers every lesson and assessment, tracks all online activities, and allows teachers and staff members to record and share all online and offline activities.

Connexus is fully customizable to meet state reporting needs in the form best suited for integration with existing information systems. It captures all needed data about students, their attendance, and their performance. This data will be used for formal reporting to various stakeholders on the students' - and the school's - instructional progress.

Depending on the needs of the learner, teacher contact - via telephone, LiveLesson session, and WebMail - with the student varies and may be as frequent as several times a day (via WebMail and telephone).

Teachers do not wait to be contacted. They are proactive participants in their students' learning plans. In addition, families are always welcome to visit the teaching/learning center during business hours to meet with their teachers in person.

LiveLesson sessions allow teachers and students to interact synchronously with one another in real time in a virtual classroom. Teachers will use LiveLesson sessions regularly to convene groups of students together to focus on particular learning topics, and may also use LiveLesson sessions for independent student work groups to collaborate on activities via chat, electronic whiteboards, and shared webserving. Threaded discussions on course-based message boards will also be used as appropriate by grade level to provide important opportunities for collaboration and interaction amongst students.

Students, teachers, and staff also interact asynchronously via WebMail. This email system is securely located within Connexus. Students, Learning Coaches, and teachers use it to communicate with each other, protecting them from spam, contact from strangers, and other mainstream email issues.

Real connections will be an important component at NCCA. Students will have the opportunity to participate in both face-to-face and virtual community activities. Face-to-face activities will include state assessments, regular field trips and outings facilitated by the staff and Community Coordinators, parent volunteers whom the school will support in organizing such activities for families who live nearby (described in the parent and community involvement response).

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

Students will engage in hands-on experiences as part of their day-to-day instructional experiences. Students will receive a collection of physical materials, and supplies (e.g., hand lens, magnet, safety goggles, thermometers), and use common household objects (e.g., coins, flashlight, measuring tape, sugar, salt), to supplement and enrich the learning experience. Students enrolled in arts classes will receive necessary supplies and use common household items.



NCCA 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 students with hands-on laboratory experiences. Through Morehead Planetarium and Science Center's DESTINY (Delivering Edge-cutting Science Technology and Internet across North Carolina for Years to come) traveling science learning program, NCCA will bring effective science learning to students and provide support for teachers.

**Field Trips:** Each year, students, teachers, and parents will take learning on the road with a variety of school-sponsored optional trips to museums, farms, science centers, cultural centers, and unique experiential learning opportunities throughout the state. Locations of field trips will be representative of the location of the student population to include all students. While not an exhaustive list, some examples might include:

- \* 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 include the National Honor Society, academic clubs, chess club, robotics club, volunteer and service clubs, and literary and arts club.

In addition, proprietary multimedia curriculum tools and resources are incorporated into students' lessons to actively engage students in learning and support their mastery of key skills and concepts. Interactive tools include:

- \* Lab Investigator - Rocks and Minerals. 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 - Virtual Dissection. Students increase their understanding of anatomy and traits of different organisms as they view videos, research specimen, and create lab reports.
- \* Virtual Spring 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.
- \* Virtual Digital Scale. 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 in 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 examined by administrative staff to track student progress.*

Students will have a great deal of flexibility regarding when and where they complete their coursework. Nevertheless, they will be held fully accountable for meeting all state-mandated attendance requirements. These requirements, including 1,025 hours of instruction, will be documented in the School Handbook (which will be finalized and approved by the Governing Board). Parents must agree to the policies in the handbook when completing enrollment. Attendance procedures will be addressed in trainings for all stakeholders (Learning Coaches, students, teachers, and administrators). If a student accrues too many unexcused absences, NCCA will follow state law in reporting non-attendance and truancy. The Governing Board will adopt a policy conforming to Session Law 2014-100, Section 8.35(b)(3) regarding student participation.

Attendance hours recorded by the Learning Coach in Connexus and verified by the teacher will be the legal record of school attendance. Unless prohibited by state regulations, attendance hours can include hours on Saturday and/or Sunday and/or holidays to meet students' weekly requirements. If a student does not participate in school activities on any day Monday-Friday, his or her Learning Coach MUST enter 0 hours on this day. These records will ensure NCCA is properly calculating and adequately monitoring that students complete the required instructional hours. The school's teaching/learning center will serve as its attendance office, and school authorities will ensure enforcement of attendance and truancy laws.

NCCA verification of attendance records includes not only the attendance hours recorded by the Learning Coach, but also lesson and assessment completion rates and the amount of communication the student has with the teacher. During course design, lesson and assessment completion times are estimated and so these can be used to estimate amount of student time spent on learning. A teacher with concerns about the validity of a student's attendance records is expected to review those completion rates and revise the student's recorded hours of attendance if they are not supported. If a Learning Coach records a high number of instructional hours in the attendance records but a student's work completion rates are not on track and/or if he or she fails to communicate on a regular basis with the teacher, he or she may not meet attendance requirements.

Connexus automatically flags student attendance status (On Track, Approaching Alarm, or Alarm) and the teachers will follow an escalated series of follow-up action to ensure that the students completes his or her lessons, assessments, and required weekly hours of attendance.

NCCA's administration will monitor and review attendance status and records on a weekly basis. After a predetermined amount of time (usually 10 days) or as of a specific date (depending on state regulations), Connexus will no longer allow a teacher or Learning Coach to edit past attendance records. Any request for adjustments to the "locked" records must first go to the Homeroom Teacher (in writing via WebMail message or email) for review and approval and then to the Attendance Coordinator for adjustment.

Regular attendance is imperative to maximize student learning. Parents will be held legally responsible for ensuring that their students are fully participating in the school, even if they have designated another individual

as their student's Learning Coach.

If a teacher becomes aware that a student is not fully participating in school as required, the student may be marked with an unexcused absence at the teacher's discretion. In addition, the Attendance Coordinator may override the number of attendance hours previously entered by a Learning Coach, by entering the code for an unexcused absence if the teachers believe the student has not participated as required. The final decision about whether an absence is considered excused or unexcused will be made by the Principal.

- b. Portray the proposed student enrollment over the first four 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 approximately 1,500 students in Year 1; 1,800 students in Year 2; 2,150 students in Year 3; and 2,592 students in Year 4. NCCA will start by serving students in grades K-9, adding a grade level each year until it is serving students in grades K-12 (Year 4). The online charter application required by the Office of Charter Schools did not permit NCCA to select more than three LEAs for the application; therefore, the application is based upon these three LEAs. Additional information has been provided in Appendix U regarding the additional LEAs. Eligible students may enroll in NCCA at any point during the school year as long as space is available. As an example, this open enrollment cycle means the number of enrolled students will be 1,500 on Day 1 of year 1 and will likely be 1,500 on Day 180 of year 1. However, some of the students will have withdrawn since the beginning of the school year and some new students will have enrolled after the start of the school year. Although the composition of the student body will change during the school year due to the open enrollment cycle, the total enrollment will remain similar throughout the year.

Of the students who attend a school supported by Connections nationally, 60% previously attended traditional public schools, 6% previously attended private/parochial schools, 6% previously attended public charter schools, 7% previously attended online schools, 12% were homeschooled, and 8% had no prior schooling. The Board anticipates a similar composition in North Carolina. A portion of students will be new to school in North Carolina (students moved from another state).

Students whose instructional needs will be effectively met by NCCA include:

- \* Students who have limited public school options
- \* Students 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 flexible schedules
- \* Students who are homebound due to illness or disability
- \* Students with special learning needs

- c. Discuss the problem of student turnover in virtual charter schools. What strategies will be utilized to ensure this acceptable rate will not be surpassed? Provide information on how these procedures will be clearly implemented before and during operation of*

*the virtual charter school.*

Students who attend a virtual charter school typically do so for a variety of reasons, including short term solutions to problems (e.g., illness). Once the problem is solved, they may choose another option. Virtual schools are not the most appropriate learning environment 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, including North Carolina, 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 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% of students transferred from another district or school within months of dropping out." ([http://www.cde.state.co.us/onlinelearning/download/OL\\_Research\\_Final.pdf](http://www.cde.state.co.us/onlinelearning/download/OL_Research_Final.pdf)) North Carolina requires the school from which a student withdraws (NCCA for example) to find the student and prove that he or she then went to another school rather than dropping out. State data systems to support this process are varied in their method and quality, but many students who withdraw from virtual schools do not provide documentation of their next school, cannot be tracked, and are eventually counted as "dropouts" regardless of their true destination.

For those students for whom it is appropriate, 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 abide by the 25% withdrawal rate as required by Session Law 2014-100, Section 8.35(c)(4).

NCCA will engage families early in the enrollment process to ensure that they understand the responsibilities of working in the online environment 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. Already, 48 information sessions for interested parties, community leaders, and stakeholders have been held in North Carolina communities.

After a student's initial enrollment 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. Teachers, students, and Learning Coaches will engage in ongoing monitoring of and early intervention in student learning and achievement through the implementation of Connections' Skills, Standards, Assessment, Intervention, and Response (SSTAIR) instructional model, the Personalized Performance Learning (PPL) program, teacher/student/family contacts, and an escalation system.

- d. *Describe policies and procedures that will be utilized by the virtual charter school regarding withdrawal of students failing to regularly participate. Include definition of terms, forms of contact, and format for student due process.*

#### Definition and Calculation of Withdrawal Rate

The Governing Board will adopt a policy regarding students who provide written intent to enroll in NCCA for a finite period of time as permitted by Session Law 2014-100, Section 8.35(c)(4). Additionally, the Governing Board will adopt a policy regarding students who fail to regularly participate in courses pursuant to Session Law 2014-100, Section 8.35(b)(3).

The school's withdrawal rate will be calculated as such:

\* Numerator: The number of students withdrawing after the 20th day of student enrollment who did not provide intent for finite enrollment.

\* Denominator: The number of students enrolled after the 20th day of student enrollment who remained in the school through the end of the school year or who graduated.

\* Students not included in the Numerator and the Denominator: students no longer eligible to enroll in a North Carolina public school; students who provide intent for finite enrollment per Session Law 2014-100, Section 8.35(c)(4); students who were withdrawn due to lack of regular participation per Session Law 2014-100, Section 8.35(b)(3); and students who were enrolled less than 20 days.

#### Definition of Withdrawal Terms

NCCA recognizes the school may serve students for a "period of time" and enrollment numbers may frequently change. Withdrawals and additions to enrollment may change class rosters and attendance logs. NCCA will draw upon the experience of our support partner, Connections, in this area to ensure data, enrollment, and attendance will be accurately reported in a timely manner.

Students may withdraw from NCCA at any time in accordance with the state statute, provided that the Learning Coach provides either evidence of homeschool registration consistent with state requirements or the name and location of another public or private school that the student will attend. Prior to withdrawing, the school will encourage the Learning Coach and/or student to discuss with the school staff the reason(s) for withdrawing as it may be possible to address issues so the student does not need to withdraw. This data will be recorded and reviewed by the Principal so school leadership can continually reflect on the school's ability to serve its families and students.

If a student becomes ineligible or leaves the charter school, NCCA will ensure all appropriate paperwork is submitted and/or forwarded to the new school. Schools will pursue truancy violations in situations where the student cannot be confirmed as attending as documented by their work

product. NCCA will follow the compulsory attendance policy in GS-115C-378.

NCCA's support partner is very familiar with, and has performed successfully on, state-initiated audits. In Ohio, the school supported by Connections 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 the 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.

#### Forms of Contact

The Governing Board, working with Board Counsel, will develop policy for school staff to use regarding contacts with students who are potentially subject to withdraw for lack of regular participation. These contacts will be documented in writing. As students' records, these will be protected and maintained in accordance with federal and state student data privacy laws.

#### Format for Student Due Process

The student handbook includes a clear and fair code of conduct that complies with the students' due process rights and aligns with the school's mission. Appropriate conduct will be expected of all students. NCCA will follow formal due process procedures to manage the discipline of students. The students' code of conduct will be explained in the handbook and include steps to be followed in the event of misbehavior.

#### 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 will begin with a thorough student placement process and progress review, including online and offline placement tests, which help to personalize the student's academic program and formulate the Personalized Learning Plan (PLP), a written plan for all members of the learning team to follow. The personalization process includes: initial academic placement and course selection, ongoing performance testing, learning style inventories, review of student work samples, detailed phone conferences, goal-setting, adjustment of student schedules, lesson pacing, instructional activities, instructional interventions, enrollment in elective courses, and strategies for families to implement.

Teachers will use a combination of state-aligned curriculum, synchronous LiveLesson sessions, and asynchronous instructional tools and resources to teach students. As in the traditional classroom, NCCA teachers will implement lessons, instruct students (via LiveLesson session), assess student learning, and provide students with ongoing feedback. Daily instructional activities include demonstrating principles, answering questions, modifying and differentiating learning activities based on student performance and needs, and providing opportunities for student interaction. Beginning with the 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 for students, e.g. state test scores, LEAP and Scantron pre-, mid-, and post-test assessment data, participation and performance metrics, intervention information, and any IEP information. An automatically updated grade book allows parents and students to see grades and course completion progress at any time.

Intervention Indicators will be displayed on the Teacher Home Page to assist a teacher's identification of students who may be in need of intervention in math, reading, or both, based on performance data. In addition, at both the section and individual student levels, the Assessment Objective Performance Report (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.

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. The Connections' developed LEAP test (Longitudinal Evaluation of Academic Progress(R)) for students in grades K-8 provides essential diagnostic information for developing the PLP and planning instruction. Administered at the beginning, middle, and end of the school year, it provides an early read on performance on state-mandated tests, and reports key accountability data on progress throughout the academic year. The school will use Scantron for students in grades 9-11, for pre-, mid-, and post-testing.

Connections Education (of which Connections Academy is a division) is accredited by AdvancED (an accrediting agency serving 27,000 public and private school districts <http://www.advanc-ed.org/>). 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 and School Council on Accreditation and School Improvement (SACS CASI). For a list of accredited schools, please visit: <http://www.connectionsacademy.com/proven-results/accreditation.aspx>

- 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 Governing Board will directly evaluate the Principal. The Principal will be the only employee directly evaluated by the Board. The Board will formally approve personnel decisions through majority vote and record in its minutes the decision to hire or terminate personnel.

Teachers will implement the Core Standards for Facilitating Student Learning (the essential values, vision, and protocol through which teachers and school leaders work together) 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.

The Core Standards for Facilitating Student Learning, as listed herein, support the mission of NCCA:

- \* Provide high quality instruction resulting in student learning
- \* Personalize student programs
- \* Monitor student performance and provide timely feedback and intervention
- \* Monitor student participation
- \* Communicate frequently
- \* Document and review all interactions
- \* Collaborate and develop professionally

NCCA will implement Connections' 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 the school. NCCA staff will learn about the evaluation system as part of their orientation course at the beginning of the school year.

At the Governing Board's discretion, a mid-year review of the school leader will be completed in December or January and a formal end-of-year review in May or June. Staff will receive both mid- and end-of-year reviews by the Principal. 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 will be reviewed with staff at the beginning of the school year, and will be available for viewing and comment throughout the year.

The outcome of an individual's evaluation will affect future decisions regarding staff retention, promotion opportunities, or disciplinary action and termination decisions. An employee rated, or likely to be rated, as "needing improvement" will be placed on an individualized Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) and given opportunity for professional development.

*c. Share the process for providing frequent, ongoing monitoring of an individual student's program that will be used to verify each student is participating in the virtual system.*

Teachers and administrators will 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.

Both Learning Coaches and teachers will have access to the electronic grade book that tracks all results and serves as the basis of changes in the student's learning plan. Students in grades 3-12 can also view the grade book. Traditional report cards will not be issued because the grade book allows immediate, up-to-the minute review of progress at any time during the school year. A key aspect to assessments is the detailed feedback provided by the teachers beyond the simple right/wrong grading of many traditional



assessment vehicles. NCCA will use a variety of data tools that provide students, parents, teachers, school administrators, institutional education partners, regulators, and researchers with views of how students are performing.

Teachers will continually monitor student learning through their performance on computer- and teacher-graded assessments, synchronous telephone calls, and LiveLesson sessions to verify student work and/or diagnose difficulties in mastering discrete skills and concepts. Connexus tracks teacher response time and teacher-student/teacher-parent communications, providing the Principal with rich, actionable data on this key aspect of student and teacher performance.

Students will engage in several formative assessments that tap into all levels of student learning such as: scored daily assessments, 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.

Throughout each unit of study, students complete assessments. Assessments that require teacher review and comment 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 unit tests. While the quizzes are cumulative, 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 assessments provide valuable reflection, feedback, and expertise from certified teachers. Students' grades will include a combination of quizzes, tests, work samples, and teacher feedback.

NCCA will use 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 assessments (DCBAs) are used by teachers to understand and address students' weaknesses with concepts. Verification curriculum-based assessments (VCBAs) are used by teachers to validate student learning of concepts for assessments where they grade earned a grade of B or higher.

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, 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 within the year, and to inform course placement and instructional needs of students.

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

NCCA will follow a Response to Intervention (RTI) multi-tiered instructional approach, SSTAIR, to curriculum and instruction, ensuring individual students receive the support they need to maximize learning. Beginning with

the North Carolina Essential 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 Personalized Learning Plan (PLP) tool and Teacher Home Page place at each teacher's fingertips all assessment data available for students, e.g., state test scores; LEAP and Scantron pre-, mid-, and post-test assessment data; participation and performance metrics; and any IEP information. Students who may not be successful in the standard program Tier I (core instructional program) receive additional support via Tier II or Tier III interventions. Teachers will monitor students' responses to interventions and adjust the type, frequency, and intensity of support as needed.

NCCA will form a Student Support Team (SST) to focus collaboratively on the needs of students who are struggling and facilitate tiered interventions using this multi-tiered approach. Supports might include an increase in LiveLesson session participation, enrollment in instructional support programs, or placement into additional remediation programs. Teachers will be trained extensively in identifying students who need interventions, how to utilize the interventions, and progress monitoring.

This process is aided by Connexus, which uses data to help identify students' intervention needs. The Teacher Home Page shows, for each student, an icon known as the intervention indicator which indicates if interventions have been identified and if they have been assigned. The teacher collaborates with the SST to determine interventions and update data that informs the indicators and logs the decision and rationale within Connexus. Also, the SST will implement an ongoing process of using instructional and assessment data to identify student intervention needs; assigning those interventions; tracking their success; and escalating, if necessary, from Tier I to Tier II to Tier III. If the student does not respond successfully to increasingly intense and frequent interventions, a referral for special education evaluation may be necessary.

In a virtual environment, struggling students 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.*

The Governing Board 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, students will participate in all required tests using whatever assessment process (online, paper and pencil, etc.) that is required. Students will participate in all required assessments.

Results of these assessments will be reported through the DPI as well as communicated directly to 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 DPI. NCCA assures that 95% of students required to participate in each required

assessment will participate in a testing environment that follows the Testing Code of Ethics Guidelines.

Fulfilling these assurances is one of the more challenging aspects of virtual education, but one that every responsible virtual school spends significant time, resources, and energy on doing successfully. Schools supported by Connections throughout the country have detailed testing plans. Teachers travel throughout the state during testing to ensure proper administration of testing. Students are committed to participate fully by the terms of enrollment. Significant effort is spent on ensuring each and every student understands and has workable plans for getting to the required testing sites.

Transportation will be provided to students whose families have a financial or logistical need for support. NCCA will comply with Session Law 2014-100, Section 3.85(c), which states a virtual charter school must maintain at least one testing center within each of the eight SBE districts.

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

The instructional program and curriculum proposed for NCCA will regularly undergo specific audit and revision. The curriculum will be updated regularly, with Governing Board approval, based on rigorous analysis of student performance in relation to the North Carolina Essential State Standards and Common Core State Standards as measured by state testing results and internal assessments. The curriculum will be regularly evaluated, upgraded, and enhanced based on the needs of the school and students, including an annual course selection process.

Teacher Course Liaisons, who are experts in their curricular areas, gather feedback from other teachers across all schools supported by Connections, and recommend updates and revisions to the curriculum based on this teacher input.

Input will be gathered on an ongoing basis via the StarTrack mechanism for lesson feedback. On virtually every lesson in their curriculum, and on the home page for each Learning Coach, is a StarTrack box inviting ratings on a five-star scale and an opportunity to provide text feedback. The ratings and feedback will be reviewed and analyzed regularly to drive improvements.

The school's support partner, Connections, utilizes ADDIE (a five-phase instructional design model consisting of Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation, and Evaluation) in the development of its curricular offerings. Each step has an outcomes that feeds into the next step in the sequence.

\*Analysis - During analysis, the curriculum team identifies the goals and objectives, the audience's needs, existing knowledge, and any other relevant characteristics. This step also considers the learning environment, any constraints, the delivery options, and the timeline for the project.

\* Design - During this systematic process of specifying learning objectives, detailed storyboards, and prototypes are often made, and the look and feel, graphic design, user-interface, and content are determined.

\* Development - Production and actual creation of the content and learning materials based on the Design phase occurs.

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

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

Through its use of the Connections curriculum and instructional design, NCCA will be aligned with leading research and national standards on effective online course development and instruction. The research underscores the importance of integration of tools for student-to-teacher and student-to-student interaction and the central role of highly qualified, specially trained professional teachers (Smith, Rosina; Clark, Tom; and Blomeyer, Robert, A Synthesis of New Research on K-12 Online Learning, Learning Point Associates/North Central Regional Educational Laboratory; Naperville, IL; 2005). In addition, the curriculum follows the National Standards for Quality Online Courses ([http://www.inacol.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/iNACOL\\_CourseStandards\\_2011.pdf](http://www.inacol.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/iNACOL_CourseStandards_2011.pdf), 2011). The curriculum and instructional design accommodate the range of learning styles and are designed for individualized pacing, balanced with optimum interaction. The rigorous program includes both fundamental skills and higher-order thinking, which together prepare students for further education as well as lifelong, independent learning.

- 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 has decided to use the Connections curriculum. NCCA will provide the online and offline curriculum materials students need to succeed. Connections curriculum development is guided by these key principles and tenets:

- \* Curriculum fosters breadth and depth of understanding in a subject area.
- \* Content is aligned to state standards.
- \* Curriculum is supported by quality, reputable, recently published textbooks and/or proven instructional resources and materials.
- \* Content and assessments are aligned, accurate, and unbiased.
- \* Content is current, relevant, and provides real-world applications.
- \* Content is appropriate for every learner (age, mastery, background, reading level, learning style, etc.).
- \* Instructional design is adaptable and flexible in order to best meet individual needs of Learning Coaches and students.
- \* Instructional design provides students opportunities to improve learning skills using technological tools (e.g., virtual labs, interactive tools, Teachlet(r) tutorials, business software, and online calculator).
- \* Scope of course is appropriate with regards to amount of content, length of course and lessons, and course requirements.
- \* Curriculum includes opportunities for developing problem solving and critical thinking skills and real world applications.
- \* Curriculum includes opportunities for collaboration and independent study.

\* Curriculum includes opportunities to develop oral and written communication skills.

\* Curriculum incorporates timely and appropriate feedback to students.

In total, Connections' courses include 1,800 Teachlet(TM) proprietary instructional movies and more than 1,000 primary source and instructional videos. In addition, the instructional design includes interactive LiveLesson sessions and threaded discussions.

Connections curriculum development also emphasizes innovation, effective implementation, evaluation of student learning, and continuous improvement. The organization strives to regularly provide new curriculum options that leverage the interactivity and engagement potential of online resources. Connections seeks to balance enhancements and additional options with the recognition that students have a wide range of learning styles and needs.

A complete list of current courses, materials, lessons, textbooks, and supplies can be found at the following URLs:

\* <http://www.connectionsacademy.com/curriculum/elementary-school/free-online-learning.aspx>

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

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

The Governing Board made sure that the Connections program works on a variety of hardware options and platforms found within educational institutions. In order to participate in the program, students need a desktop computer and monitor (or laptop), and a printer and an Internet connection.

Connexus, the EMS that is central to the Connections program, can be accessed from different devices such as a mobile phone or desktop computer for certain courses. Connections tests Connexus features regularly to make sure they are working well on various devices and software.

Headsets with microphones are provided where two-way audio use is required by courses for LiveLesson session interaction.

*h. Share the availability of hardware or application support that will be made available to every student within the virtual charter school*

Training 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 technology support representative at any time by calling a toll-free number during business hours. Representatives provide expert tech support, answer questions, and directly connect callers with other resources as needed. There is also a searchable Online Help system. Since they will be using their own computers, Connections' Technical Support will help students and parents configure Internet security settings and find additional Internet filtering software.

Each student will receive a license to access and use Connexus during the

academic year for the purposes of utilizing the curriculum and services, including providing web-based access from non-school sites to the virtual school program by students, parent/guardians, Learning Coaches, teachers, and administrators. Access to other technologies is provided through Connexus, including the Student Information System (SIS); lesson scheduling tools; accountability tools; WebMail; instant messaging; secure chat, video, and audio streaming; and message board forums.

In addition to the Connexus infrastructure, Connections technology staff members have expansive knowledge of computer technology. 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.

Technical support is available through Online Help (in Connexus) 24/7/365. Live phone support is available via Connections Support Services to parents, students, and staff, Monday-Friday 9:00 AM-9:00 PM (Eastern Time). NCCA will provide initial technical support to ensure students have the minimum requirements necessary to participate in the education program and ongoing technical support on an as-needed basis for their use of Connexus.

- 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 Connexus technology components are housed, has redundant generators and Internet connections. Multiple systems monitor all components of Connexus, including hardware and software, 24/7/365. Alerts are sent immediately whenever an issue is detected, from a bug in the software or a course to a server failure, and Connections' 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. From a user perspective, such as students, Learning Coaches, and teachers, should a power outage occur due to inclement weather, Connexus data and features will remain undamaged. The grade book, scheduler, course completion data, and other elements will continue to remain updated and will be available when the user re-gains power and logs back into the system.

NCCA will have an emergency plan to include the potential closing of the teaching/learning center due to weather or other emergencies. The school will notify families via a "must read" WebMail message explaining the details of the teaching/learning center closure and add a banner on the home page of Connexus. In addition, school administrators will change the voicemail announcing the details of the teaching/learning center closure and the availability, or lack of availability, of teachers and other school

services. Communication to the families will include a current status update and the expected duration of the closing and who to contact and how to contact them.

Connections support personnel will be located in places where conditions may be different from those in the teaching/learning center location. Such services may be occasionally interrupted even when school operations are running as usual, or vice versa. Teachers will work from home in these instances so students are able to continue their lessons. Even if the school closes due to hazardous weather or other emergencies, students should still complete lessons and mark their attendance for the day.

Two significant benefits of the virtual school environment are the flexibility of scheduling and the flexibility of the location. Should a student lose power for several days and be unable to log in, he/she can still stay on target to finish the class by making up the time once the power is restored. In addition, virtual schooling allows a student to attend class from any location, anywhere. Therefore, if a student loses power in his/her home, he/she can logon from a local library, coffee shop, or community center, and still continue attending school.

- 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, partnering with Connections, 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. Connections also supplies shipping materials with prepaid labels to families for return shipping at the end of the year.

After final confirmation of enrollment, physical materials will be shipped via UPS Ground to the address verified during the Proof of Residency (POR) Process. Requests for course material will be seamlessly processed to the Connections fulfillment center, which coordinates and manages the orders and ships to students' homes.

NCCA will arrange for physical, non-consumable materials to be shipped back at the end of the year. On behalf of the school, Connections will process all returns from students. At the end of the school year or upon withdrawal from the schools, the Connections Returns Department will reach out to the household to make arrangements to collect the materials. They will work with families to coordinate the return, including arranging for pick up from students' homes. Connections will provide prepaid UPS Return Labels to each household to return the materials.

### **Curriculum and Instructional Design:**

*Describe the basic learning environment (e.g., classroom-based, independent study), including class size and structure for each grade span (i.e. elementary, middle, high) the school would ultimately serve.*

NCCA will start by serving students in grades K-9, adding a grade level each year until it is serving students in grades K-12 (Year 4). All grade spans are included in the descriptions as the school will serve students

throughout K-12 during this pilot.

#### Grades K-8

NCCA will be staffed with an anticipated student-to-teacher ratio of no greater than 50:1 (Session Law 2014-100, Section 8.35(b)(2)) and at least 90% of the teaching faculty will reside within North Carolina per Section Law 2014-100, Section 8.35(c)(3).

**Individualized Instruction:** Students are at the center of the Learning Triad, whose members include a face-to-face Learning Coach, one or more certified teachers, and trained Connections curriculum specialists. Students will work with rigorous curriculum aligned to both the North Carolina Essential State Standards and the Common Core State Standards. The student planner shows a student's schedule of upcoming lessons and activities on one convenient page. Teachers work with students individually on their Personalized Learning Plan (PLP) maximizing their potential by challenging academic strengths and diagnosing and addressing academic weaknesses. Teachers tap into a wide array of resources and modify lessons as needed for each student.

**High-quality Teaching:** Certified teachers, with North Carolina certificates when required, will implement the Core Standards for Facilitating Student Learning at Connections Academy and will participate in a performance evaluation system aligned to state teaching standards, school goals, and student performance. Through ongoing teacher training and professional development and participation in professional learning communities (PLC), teachers will be effective and consistently focused on continuous improvement and student learning.

Teachers will work closely with each student 1-on-1 using innovative technology tools and instructional pedagogy. The teacher will be responsible for instructing students, monitoring progress, evaluating assessments and work products, providing instructional and intervention assistance, scoring assessment activities, and providing feedback on the student's performance. They also grade students in each subject and make promotion or retention decisions. Depending on the needs of the learner, teacher contact (via telephone, LiveLesson session, and WebMail) with the student varies and may be as frequent as several times a day and at least once a week for each of the core courses via a scheduled LiveLesson session.

**Parent Involvement:** A parent, or another caring adult, will serve as a Learning Coach and play an active role in the learning process by 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.

#### Grades 9-12

High school students (including many who may not have 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.



NCCA will offer all courses required for high school graduation in North Carolina. The school will offer a robust selection of 16 College Board-approved Advanced Placement(R) course offerings.

The teachers will be dedicated, experienced educators who are highly qualified specialists in their fields. The teachers will form strong, 1-on-1 educational relationships with students and provide personalized instruction. The program will allow students the ability to vary their pace and work from any location. All students will meet with a teacher to develop a PLP that will prepare them for success on any path they choose: college, military, or a career.

Provide a synopsis of the planned curriculum, including:

1. *One sample curriculum outline (in graph form) in the Appendices (Appendix B) for one core subject (specific to the school's purpose) for each grade span (i.e. elementary, middle, high) the school would ultimately serve.*
2. *If you are proposing a high school, as Appendix B2, provide a visual disseminating what courses (core content and electives) will be offered at the charter high school to ensure students meet the proposed charter school's graduation requirements. Please ensure the projected staff and budget aligns with the course offerings.*
3. *Identify how this curriculum aligns with the proposed charter school's mission, targeted student population, and North Carolina Accountability Model.*

NCCA's curriculum will prepare students for the global economy they will be living in and working in as adults. The personalized approach will provide important skills to students including independent thinking, problem solving, and collaborating not only with people in their community but potentially across the globe. 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) addressed the Common Core State Standards and North Carolina Essential Standards. The 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. The curriculum is able to align to updated standards as well. Beyond the alignment of content however, NCCA as a virtual school will be uniquely positioned to develop on a daily basis students' skills accessing, evaluating, and synthesizing information; working collaboratively with peers in cross-cultural settings to solve problems and apply knowledge.

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.

The curriculum will ensure college and career readiness by offering courses that fulfill all North Carolina graduation requirements, allow for dual enrollment and early college options, and address key skills that students need for success in the 21st century, as detailed in the Partnership for

21st Century Skills ([www.21stcenturyskills.org](http://www.21stcenturyskills.org)). These skills include critical thinking and problem solving, global awareness, self-directed learning, collaboration skills, and technology literacy. NCCA will offer a variety of Career Technical Education (CTE) courses that allow students to combine both college preparation and workforce skills development into one customized education program.

NCCA will provide a balanced, challenging high school experience focused on students' pursuing paths that lead to success whether via college or immediate career choice. The student, parents, teachers, and their school counselor will monitor their personalized path along the way. NCCA will provide a comprehensive high school program with four levels of academic coursework: Foundations, Standard, Honors, and Advanced Placement. While all four levels are designed to meet state standards and provide students a rigorous curriculum, the four levels enable differentiation based on student needs, and college and career goals.

Students who enroll in the program from grades K-8 and elect to continue into high school will notice that the high school curriculum introduces increased structure and a pacing system that encourages all the students in a single class to move forward at a similar speed. The high school program involves more online experience than the program for younger students, as appropriate for secondary school learners. The high school program will include substantial teacher-directed instruction through synchronous and asynchronous e-learning tools. The high school core curriculum integrates digital and/or print versions of textbooks from major publishers with enhanced multimedia, interactive materials and resources, discussions, and communication/conferencing tools. In addition, students will have offline assessments, projects, novels, and practice work.

Each 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.

- 4. 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 for each grade span (i.e. elementary, middle, high) the school would ultimately serve.*

Grades K-8

Teachers will participate in professional learning and training programs to ensure they master and implement best practices in virtual learning, including individualizing and personalizing the instruction and learning plans through the PLP process and 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.

Within the first 30 days of employment, all teachers (and the Principal) will complete either the Teacher Orientation Course (for new teachers) or the Returning Teacher Orientation Course (for returning teachers) and Exploring Your Courses, complying with Session Law 2014-100, Section 8.35(c)(3). These courses will be delivered through Connexus and contain lessons, assessments, and links to the online tutorials. These courses

prepare teachers for teaching through the Connexus platform. They cover curriculum, assessment, personalizing instruction, school year events, grading, the grade book, communication, and essential Connexus tools. Upon successful completion of the course and assessment, teachers will be ready to begin instruction.

Individualizing instruction allows for multiple pathways for learner achievement. Supported by their teachers and Learning Coach, students will work individually on their PLP, maximizing their potential by ensuring that academic strengths are challenged and that any academic weaknesses are diagnosed and addressed. Teachers tap into a wide array of resources and modify lessons as needed for each student.

For students in grades K-12, teachers will personalize their approach to each student's learning. Teachers will provide focused learning opportunities through individual or small group lessons via the phone, LiveLesson sessions, Message Boards, and WebMail messages. Teachers will monitor and motivate students; continually assess student progress; and modify, enhance, and supplement lessons to emphasize areas where students are deficient or have a particular strength or interest.

#### Grades 9-12

High school teachers will implement instructional strategies similar to those of middle school teachers. High school teachers will focus on individualizing instruction that allows for multiple pathways for learner achievement. Teachers will work with students on their individual PLPs, maximizing their potential by ensuring that academic strengths are challenged and that any academic weaknesses are diagnosed and addressed. Instruction will be customized to best fit a student's individual needs. 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.

NCCA will utilize ongoing assessments to measure student progress and a technology-based assessment tool to measure student gains over the school year. NCCA will use the results of the assessments to inform professional development plans and adjust the method of instruction to students accordingly. In addition, the automated alarm system embedded within Connexus alerts teachers, students, and parents when students are "Approaching Alarm" or in "Alarm" based on pre-set assessment indicators.

The AOPR provides real-time student performance data on essential skills and standards based upon individual math and language arts assessments. Teachers identify the objectives students should master by the end of that grade level based upon the North Carolina Essential Standards and the Common Core State Standards, and the report displays students' performance against the objectives. Data can be sorted to identify students who have or have not mastered specific objectives.

5. *Explain how the proposed instructional plan and graduation requirements will ensure student readiness to transition from grade to grade and to the next grade span upon program*

*completion.*

Grades K-8

To be promoted to the next grade, students in grades K-8 must demonstrate adequate progress in their overall course of study. This includes students needing to successfully complete their English Language Arts and math courses, (certain students with IEPs may be excluded from this requirement), meeting and exceeding performance, participation and attendance metrics as determined by the school or state requirements, and participation in the required testing. 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 Principal in accordance with applicable state regulations.

Grades 9-12

Through a comprehensive guidance counseling program focused on college and career readiness, students will be provided career and work force resources, course options, and work student internship opportunities. NCCA will address credits, transcripts, and counseling. Teachers and counselors will 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 personalized progression plan, automated in Connexus, defines and tracks requirements that must be accomplished to meet a goal. The most common use will be to track students in meeting their graduation requirements. A wide variety of core and elective courses will be offered to meet North Carolina graduation requirements.

Students will have the option to take Career Technical Education (CTE) courses, CTE courses encourage students to explore and prepare for careers in finance, marketing, psychology, criminal justice, and more. The high school program will offer a rigorous college preparatory curriculum, providing an opportunity for students to enroll in Honors and AP courses. Students will be able to choose from dozens of Honors courses and 16 AP courses.

The curriculum uses a standard whereby one credit equals approximately 160 hours of instruction - North Carolina requires 150 clock hours.

(<http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/curriculum/home/graduationrequirements.pdf>) In order to graduate, each student must successfully complete a minimum of 24 credits (two more than the 22 required by the Future Ready Core Course of Study Requirements) 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 comply with Future Ready Core requirements. In time, the school may have the ability to offer the Future Ready Occupational program of study.

High school students will be awarded credit only for courses in which they have earned a passing grade. This applies to both courses taken at NCCA and at other schools.

Student transcripts will be maintained in Connexus. For high school students, school counselors will enter data from previous schools' transcripts into the External Course Tool, adding the information to the student's NCCA transcript. Courses completed at NCCA will appear on the transcript as "In Progress" during the semester, and as "Completed" once the

final grading is finished. Students and Learning Coaches will always have access to view and print a copy of the transcript. They can also request that hard copies of official transcripts be printed and sent to the family or an outside entity (e.g., college or university). Parents (or students 18 or over) must first sign an Authorization to Release Educational Records form before official transcripts can be submitted to any outside entity. When the authorization is submitted, the school will mark the appropriate fields in Connexus accordingly and upload a scanned version, if needed. Transcripts will normally be provided within two school days of receiving the signed authorization form.

6. *Provide a school academic calendar in Appendix C.*

7. *Describe in a brief narrative below on how the calendar coincides with the tenets of the proposed mission and education plan.*

The Governing Board will approve the 10-month school year calendar annually. The academic calendar will include a minimum of 1,025 hours of instruction (<http://www.ncpublicschools.org/fbs/accounting/calendar/>). To support the mission of a virtual school, the calendar may be extended to allow students and families more flexibility in completing the 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 will be expected to follow the school calendar.

The Governing Board-approved school calendar will include days when teachers will not be available due to professional development (all other Support Services will be available during these days) and days when the school is completely closed (no Support Services will be available during these days). Student learning may continue during any days when the school is closed as students will still have access to their online course, learning content, and PLP.

### **Whole Child Development**

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

*Students will have access to more than 25 clubs and activities through which they can explore interests beyond the classroom, develop leadership skills, and make friends. Clubs and activities include online and in-person meetings.*

*The clubs participate in events similar to brick-and-mortar schools such as Math Olympiads, Odyssey of the Mind, and Geography Bee. More information on how these clubs are supported in a virtual school model is provided at the following URLs:*

\* <http://www.connectionsacademy.com/curriculum/clubs-activities/math-clubs.aspx>

\* <http://www.connectionsacademy.com/california-online-school-ripon/curriculum/clubs-activities/activities.aspx>

*Some of the clubs and activities include:*

\* *Chess Club: Members learn, socialize, and play in an atmosphere of friendly competition. After completing an online tutorial for either beginner or advanced players, students are matched with competitors of the same skill level and games begin. Students can even play in a national tournament*

on an exclusive Connections site.

\* *College Planning Club:* Designed for students in grades 9-12, this club helps those who plan to attend college develop a portfolio that focuses on elements sought by college admissions committees.

\* *Robotics Club:* The club guides students through the exciting world of robots. Students define what a robot is (and what it is not), study the myths that surround robots, examine how robots are used in movies and stories, and consider how robots assist humans. Experts in the field of robotics help students learn more about artificial intelligence and what the future holds for humans and machines.

\* *Leadership and Global Awareness Club:* This club challenges students who are natural leaders in their communities to take on a leadership role at the state, national, and international levels. Students meet regularly to discuss, plan, and share service learning projects and outcomes. Students learn about various global cultures historically and currently in an effort to better prepare themselves for careers and lives in a global economy.

\* *Student Newspaper:* The Monitor is the student-managed, student-staffed monthly newspaper. As they work together, students learn about group dynamics, organization strategies, and team building exercises while researching and writing stories on current events, sports, entertainment, and fashion.

A club in a school supported by Connections in Pennsylvania won the state engineering competition for a third year in a row, competing against brick-and-mortar and virtual schools, and took second place in the national competition, proving that the program is an ideal combination of real-world face-to-face learning and virtual education.

Representatives of NCCA met with the North Carolina Council on Economic Education, North Carolina Rural Entrepreneurship through Action Learning, Artspace, the Museum of Life+Science, and the Joel Lane Museum House to discuss educational partnerships.

NCCA will produce monthly newsletters that celebrate student and school successes, showcase student work, provide tips from teachers, and highlight upcoming events. Connections also produces an online yearbook, in which students are encouraged to participate. NCCA will apply for a chapter of the National Honor Society. Of schools supported by Connections nationwide, 19 are members of the National Honor Society and 15 are members of the National Junior Honor Society.

Students who have demonstrated outstanding talent in the performing arts, competitive sports, or math and science will have the opportunity to flourish at one of the school's three Specialty Academy programs devoted to fostering focused growth: the Sports Academy, the Science and Technology Academy, and the Performing Arts Academy. These academies will give students the opportunity to network and learn from other students in their field of interest. The academies also provide guest speakers, collaborative projects, and competitions.

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-year events such as picnics or bowling leagues as well as educational field trips throughout the year. These activities and events are organized through the school staff and Community Coordinators throughout the state. Community Coordinators are volunteer parents whom NCCA will support in organizing such activities for families who live nearby. Families are notified through WebMail and the school newsletters. In addition, clubs and activities let students:

\* Easily make friends and have fun

\* Connect with students throughout the state and across the country

\* Develop leadership skills

- \* *Explore new interests and expand knowledge*
- \* *Participate in contests and competitions*

*Face-to-face activities include field trips and community outings facilitated by staff and/or Community Coordinators. Students may go on trips to museums, farms, science centers, cultural centers, and unique experiential learning opportunities throughout the state. While not an exhaustive list, some examples might include:*

- \* *Artspace (Wake County)*
- \* *Joel Lane Museum House (Wake County)*
- \* *Harvey B. Gantt Center for African-American Arts & Culture (Mecklenburg County)*
- \* *Carolinas Aviation Museum (Mecklenburg County)*
- \* *Museum of Life+Science (Durham County)*
- \* *North Carolina Arboretum (Buncombe County)*
- \* *Wright Brothers National Memorial (Dare County)*
- \* *International Civil Rights Center and Museum (Guilford County)*

*Through our partnership with Connections, we will offer our students the widest possible range of extracurricular opportunities throughout the school year. This includes clubs and activities, specialty academy programs, a Leadership Speaker series, and a yearbook. Participation in each of these Student Experience opportunities enhances student socialization as well as improves academic achievement and school retention rates. All student experience extracurricular activities are non-credit and have no impact on student grades. Students will be able to customize the way in which they participate in these experiences. They can:*

- \* *Participate in LiveLesson sessions*
- \* *Engage in Message Board discussions*
- \* *Converse with fellow club members via WebMail messages*
- \* *Listen to LiveLesson recordings posted in the Virtual Library*
- \* *Create and submit work to be shared in LiveLesson sessions, on Message Boards, or in the weekly E-News*
- \* *Upload content into the yearbook*
- \* *Respond to polls and surveys in the yearbook*
- \* *Hear from experts in particular fields*
- \* *Collaborate with peers*

- 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 student participate in a planned physical education program designed to optimize their physical, mental, emotional, and social development. We will ensure students are engaged in a variety of physical activities and sports. The physical education program will be aligned to state standards and will:*

- \* *Maintain physical, social, and emotional health in students by practicing healthy behaviors and goal setting*
- \* *Be age and developmentally appropriate and be taught at each grade level*
- \* *Be coordinated and managed by an education professional*

*Students in Grades K-2: Students will learn games and activities that require active participation and will be introduced to overall health and wellness behaviors and concepts. The games and activities that involve movement and motor skills are grouped in thematic units. There are three different options that students in grades K-2 will be able to choose from to fulfill their Physical Education requirement. These*

*include the Personal Fitness Program, the Connections Fitness Program, and Yoga. Students will choose which program they would like to participate in, and may change or add a program during the year. Students' participation and progress will be monitored through daily recordings in the Activity Tracker.*

*Students in Grades 3-5: Students will focus on developing a healthy lifestyle which requires acquiring knowledge to make positive decisions about exercise and nutrition. There are three programs provided in these courses: the Personal Fitness Program, the Connections Fitness Program, and Yoga. Students may start with one program and chose another as they proceed through the course or they may participate in the same program throughout the course. The curriculum includes the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports Tests. Students will record their results on a periodic basis and will receive the appropriate award depending on the performance level. Teachers will monitor students' participation and progress through the Activity Tracker and periodic performance tests.*

*Students in Grades 6-8: Students will learn and apply the concepts and skills necessary for lifelong health and physical fitness. In the health portion of the course, students will be introduced and assessed on various topics ranging from movement concepts to proper nutrition and fitness, as well as the skills to ensure the development of a healthy lifestyle. There are three programs provided in these courses: the Personal Fitness Program, the Connections Fitness Program, and Yoga. Students may start with one program and choose another as they proceed through the course or they may participate in the same program throughout the course. The curriculum includes the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports Tests. Students will record their results on a periodic basis and will receive the appropriate award depending on the performance level. Teachers will monitor students' participation and progress through the Activity Tracker and periodic performance tests.*

*Students in Grades 9-12: Students may have several courses to choose from to fulfill their physical education credits. Teachers will monitor student participation and performance using the escalation system, the school's grade book, and CBAs. To track students' day-to-day physical activities and to ensure participation, Connections 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 auto-populate by grade and state requirements. Students will export the data to their teacher and the data will be used to verify that students have engaged in physical fitness activities and have met the requirements. Activity Tracker inspires students to get active and be healthy.*

- 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.*

*The guidance program will serve all students and will be delivered by certified school counselors, with the support of the Connections' Director of Counseling. The counseling program will offer individual and group counseling, as needed, and will focus on academic development, personal and social growth and college and career readiness activities through a variety of communication tools (LiveLesson sessions, phone calls, Message Boards, Virtual Library, newsletters, and face-to-face events). The counseling team will work to engage students and support both their academic and emotional growth. The counseling team will communicate with students and parents to ensure post-secondary plans are established and students are following through on actions to realize their post-graduation goals.*

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



*will have appropriate North Carolina licenses and certification. The counseling program is built on relationships, so counselors are readily accessible to students and families online, in person, and by phone. Counselors are at the heart of fostering students' engagement, safety, and wellness. As they become aware of issues concerning students' school participation, mental and emotional health or overall well-being, the counselor collaborates with school staff to ensure the student is supported by teachers and the family is connected with resources, as needed. With the additional support from Connections and its collaborative network of school counselors, NCCA will bring both individual attention and national expertise to students and families.*

*Counselors will review each students' transcripts to determine when an Honors or AP course is appropriate. Counselors will 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/ACT*
- \* 1-to-1 counseling with seniors to provide resources and assistance with post-secondary planning, including career options, vocational training, and selecting the right college*

*High school students will have access to the national counseling LiveLesson session program, which delivers weekly guidance curriculum lessons and national college admissions sessions throughout the school year. In addition, students will be encouraged to enroll in College Planning (grades 9-12) and Career Explorations (grades 6-12) clubs, which include regular LiveLesson sessions with a college counselor. NCCA will also offer Student Development courses (for example: Career Exploration, College Prep with SAT/ACT, Critical Thinking and Study Skills, Life Management Skills and Internship and Work Study).*

*The counselor will also plan additional sessions for students which will address specific student needs. The counselor will be a resource to students, families, and staff in ensuring that all students are safe. She/he will ensure all staff members are trained on student distress protocols. She/he will actively seek resources in the communities which families may need to address the personal and social needs of the child. The counseling program will be based on the American School Counselor Association framework, encouraging membership for all professional school counselors, and abiding by their legal and ethical standards of practice.*

*Graduates of schools supported by Connections have been accepted at Queens University of Charlotte, the College of William and Mary, Old Dominion University, the University of Notre Dame, the US Air Force Academy and hundreds of other colleges. The counselor will work with post-secondary institutions on behalf of students.*

- 5. List strategies teachers 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 will also be used as appropriate by grade level to provide opportunities for collaboration and interaction. Teachers will be further trained in creating online student communities and in developing a personal rapport with students through frequent*

*communications and interactions.*

*Teachers will be trained in the importance of providing students with feedback that is timely, specific, meaningful, and actionable. Professional development sessions will provide teachers with examples of effective feedback based on the research of Grant Wiggins in his book, Seven Keys to Effective Feedback. Teachers will learn that effective feedback is directly tied to a shared goal between the learner and the teacher. Hands-on activities and analysis of sample feedback will help teachers learn how to provide feedback that gives students the opportunity to improve the task, or more successfully reach the desired goal.*

*Feedback will be provided in many ways - through the use of rubrics, WebMail messages, grade book comments, and Curriculum Based Assessments (CBAs), which are conducted with the students via phone. Teachers will use message boards and LiveLesson sessions to allow students to work with their peers and gain feedback from each other.*

*The curriculum includes many rubrics for students, teachers, and families. Rubrics play a role in ensuring that learners understand what is expected of them. Rubrics also provide focus for teachers and insight for students to understand how submitted work measures up to expectations. Teachers will use guiding questions and provide students with specific feedback on rubrics, including suggestions for improvement.*

### **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.*

The NCCA staff will be supported by Connections experts in special education, gifted education, and English language learning. Teachers will regularly differentiate and personalize instruction as part of the SSTAIR instructional model, a multi-tiered Response to Intervention (RTI) model. SSTAIR involves administering universal screeners, implementing targeted interventions as needed, conducting regular assessments, monitoring progress, and collecting data to measure the student's response to intervention. NCCA's multi-disciplinary Student Support Team (SST) will meet regularly to identify and discuss strategies to assist struggling students and communicate with parents about their children's success.

Teachers will use universal screeners such as LEAP; DIBELS (as appropriate); and Scantron pre-, mid-, and post-assessments, as well as general education progress and CBAs, to identify struggling students and intervene initially at the Tier I level. Tier I interventions will include proprietary and third-party tools and strategies to differentiate instruction.

When students do not make adequate progress despite differentiated instruction within the core curriculum used in Tier I, teachers will consult with the SST to initiate a Tier II intervention. Tier II support generally begins after a teacher has tried instructional supports and interventions over a four-week time frame and has documentation showing that the student is not responding successfully. Tier II instruction can use many of the same instructional strategies and/or research-based programs as Tier I; however, it is the increase in the frequency and intensity of their use that defines

it as Tier II. Intervention will be explicit, systematic, and targeted to the greatest area of student learning needs.

Strategic intervention and progress monitoring may be provided through supplemental instructional support programs (SISPs) such as SuccessMaker(R) and Math XL(R). Instructional strategies such as increased targeted live synchronous instruction, lesson modifications, and alternative methods of presenting material may provide the support needed to make significant academic growth. Tier II instructional support will typically be provided two to three times per week for 20-30 minutes per session. Formal progress monitoring will be documented in the student's log along with supporting performance data.

Students that are not successful with Tier I instructional supports and differentiation activities, or Tier II supplemental interventions, may need more intensive Tier III intervention. Tier III interventions increase the occurrence of live, synchronous direct instruction through the extensive use of LiveLesson sessions and instructional strategies and research-based programs that are explicit, systematic, and targeted to specific student learning needs. Time spent on electives and other supplemental courses is often minimized to focus on basic skills. In addition to an increased focus on core curricular content, Tier III teachers incorporate additional online resources to assess and monitor student performance and address students' instructional needs.

Students enrolled in the Tier III level of intervention will receive a minimum of 20-30 additional minutes of instruction four to five days per week to focus more intensively on skill deficits and areas of concern. Tier III will also include frequent, regular progress monitoring as part of the implementation of this instructional program.

With its record of accomplishment and experience with remediation for mastery of essential skills, NCCA's partnership with Connections assures that NCCA will have access to all needed expertise in addressing the needs of low-achieving students. Schools supported by Connections have demonstrated success with special needs populations. The individualization of the program will help meet the diversity of needs, linguistic structures, and unique cultures that are valued in North Carolina.

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.*
- b) *Specific instructional programs, practices, and strategies the school will employ to ensure academic success and equitable access to the core academic program for ELL students.*
- c) *Plans for monitoring and evaluating the progress and success of ELL students, including exiting students from ELL services.*

NCCA will follow state procedures to identify ELL students. NCCA will designate an ELL Lead. The ELL Lead will work with content teachers, Learning Coaches, and students to ensure content material is adapted and accessible for ELL students. The ELL Lead has a key role in ensuring integration of students into the school community. The ELL Lead will:

- \* Maintain student files
- \* Provide instructional consultation to Learning Coaches

- \* Provide direct instruction to ELL students via LiveLesson sessions and phone calls
- \* Conduct progress monitoring throughout the school year
- \* Create and implement targeted interventions based on data from progress monitoring
- \* Monitor exited ELL students for academic progress using state-specific criteria for two years
- \* Stay current on state legislation pertaining to ELL students

All incoming families will complete the North Carolina home language survey. If a language other than English is spoken by parents or the student, the student will be screened to identify their English proficiency level. If there is no record of a student having taken the state-required WIDA W-APT language screening test, NCCA will test the student within 30 days of enrollment in-person by trained test administrators. NCCA will notify parents or legal guardians of the screening test result and program placement decisions according to North Carolina procedures. NCCA will provide notifications in English and in a language that parents can understand, to the extent feasible.

Once identified as an ELL student, a student will be provided support based on English proficiency level via LiveLesson sessions by a certified ELL teacher. Instruction will be standards-aligned and based on scientific research for English language acquisition using the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) framework to help students attain English proficiency in reading, writing, listening, and speaking. In sheltered support classes, grade level content will be made comprehensible for ELL students and teachers will promote academic language skills. ELL students will fully participate in the core curriculum.

NCCA will assess progress in all ELL students' English proficiency and use data to inform ELL instructional decisions. All ELL students will participate in the state's annual language proficiency assessment, ACCESS for ELLs. ACCESS test results will help determine program placement and allow teachers to adapt content to individual student needs. All mandated state tests will be administered to ELL students as required by law.

NCCA will also inform parents of the right to opt out of language programs. Upon declining, students will continue in their regular core curriculum. However, students who opt out of services must continue to participate in the state's annual language proficiency assessment, ACCESS for ELLs. NCCA will continue to notify students' parents of the assessment and results.

When a student demonstrates proficiency, a school-based team consisting of the ELL Lead, the student's content teachers, and the student's parents or legal guardians, will decide whether the student still needs ELL instruction. They will use the ACCESS scores, class performance, state test results, academic grades, and teacher recommendations to determine the student's language classification. If the team determines that the student is English proficient and can successfully perform in class without significant language support, and demonstrate advanced levels of English proficiency on the annual ACCESS test, they will be reclassified and moved to the monitoring stage. NCCA will monitor ELL students for academic progress using state-specific criteria for two years after program exit.

A Connections ELL specialist will work with teachers, Learning Coaches, and students to adapt the core material for ELL students and provide appropriate supplemental resources, including various technologies to facilitate language acquisition.

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.*
  - b) *Plans for monitoring and evaluating the progress and success of intellectually gifted students.*

Academically or intellectually gifted students will thrive at NCCA. NCCA will implement the robust Connections Gifted and Talented program for students in grades 3-8 and the Honors/AP program for high school students. Together, both programs achieved a 97% parent satisfaction rating in schools supported by Connections nationally.

NCCA will attain approval for the process of identifying academically and intellectually gifted students. The placement process will assure that once gifted students are identified, they are placed appropriately according to the North Carolina Academically or Intellectually Gifted (AIG) Program Standards. NCCA will inform families and the community through website postings and school-wide communications regarding gifted offerings. Through shared inquiry discussions and classes designed specifically for the gifted student, high achievers will be able to investigate in a safe environment what it means to be gifted.

NCCA will also offer a focused gifted program for selected grades. This approach will incorporate the same educational standards as the standard offering, but with more challenging assessments that will be covered at an accelerated pace. Enrichment activities that expand upon lesson topics and promote higher-level thinking and understanding will be provided. Gifted learners will be grouped together and given opportunities for group interaction through LiveLesson sessions.

The Gifted and Talented program will provide gifted students in grades 3-8 the opportunities and challenges they need to be successful while learning at their own pace. During the enrollment and placement process, gifted students may be placed in different curriculum levels for different subjects, to support a specific need. 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. Gifted students in grades 6-8 will also have the opportunity to be enrolled in specially designed gifted courses in language arts, math, and science. Gifted courses will allow students greater opportunities to interact with the teacher and other students; explore grade-level content; participate in extension projects, investigations, and activities that integrate skills and promote higher-level thinking; participate in individualized activities to develop and apply knowledge; and choose from a wide variety of electives and club activities to supplement learning in core subjects. NCCA will also offer an exclusive online version of Junior Great Books(R) where students will enjoy age-appropriate works and participate in online literary inquiry and discussions with other high-ability students.

The high school program offers a rigorous college preparatory curriculum that provides an opportunity for students to enroll in Honors and AP courses. High school students may choose from dozens of Honors courses and 16 AP courses. Honors courses will offer advanced students opportunities to participate in extension projects, investigations, and activities that require integrated skills application and higher-level thinking. Counselors will carefully review each student's transcript to determine when an Honors course is appropriate. Course selection will be made in close consultation with students and their parents. NCCA will monitor the success of intellectually gifted students by reviewing and assessing performance on state assessments, Scantron assessments, AP exams, ACT/SAT, and by tracking college acceptances of high school seniors.

Parents will be informed of procedures to resolve disagreements between themselves and NCCA regarding identification and provision of services to their academically or intellectually gifted child. NCCA will monitor the progress of gifted students and evaluate the services offered by reviewing and assessing performance on grade-level assessments, national exams, and by tracking college acceptances.

### **Exceptional Children**

*The public charter school cannot deny admission to any child eligible for special education services as identified under the federal legislation Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA), IDEA regulations, and Article 9 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 'highly qualified' special educators 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 you 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.*
2. *Provide the process for identifying students who may be eligible for special education services as identified in the federal 'Child Find' mandate. Be sure to include how student evaluations and assessments will be completed.*
3. *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 (on site)*
  - c) *Record Compliance (on site)*

### **Identifying Students and Child Find**

NCCA will serve students with disabilities and will remain in compliance with all state and federal IDEA regulations for public schools.

**Identification/Child Find:** The NCCA staff and administration will comply with state and federal Child Find regulations. The Manager of Special Education will serve as the Child Find coordinator and provide Child Find information to school staff, parents, and state and local organizations and agencies.

**Pre-referral/Referral/Evaluation:** Students may be referred for special

education by their parents or by the SST. The SST, consisting of general education teachers, intervention specialists, and school administrators will regularly review struggling students. The SST will consult with the parents and address struggling students' needs through the Response to Intervention (RTI) process. The teacher will implement and document interventions and the student's response to interventions with parental consent. When a parent requests a special education evaluation, the process occurs concurrently with the RTI process as appropriate. The evaluation will be coordinated with the parent and an evaluator in close proximity to the student. Once the evaluation is complete, the parents will join an interdisciplinary team meeting to review the assessment results and determine the student's eligibility for special education, completing the process within 90 days of NCCA's receipt of signed parental consent for evaluation.

Rehabilitation Act of 1973 - Section 504 Students: NCCA will write Section 504 plans for students who are not receiving services under IDEA but require accommodations and modifications to their instructional program including modified instructional materials or assistive technology. Existing Section 504 plans will remain in place for new students. NCCA personnel will identify Section 504 Eligible Students and will complete a plan for each identified eligible student.

#### Records of Students with Disabilities

NCCA will fully comply with the requirements of FERPA and IDEA. FERPA allows for certain exceptions that would allow NCCA to receive student education records from a previous school without the prior written consent of parents. However, upon enrollment in NCCA, parents will be asked to sign a Release of Records form as written consent for the release of their student's education records from the student's previous district. NCCA will request parents' written consent for the release of their student's education records to a third party. The school will also comply with the Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment and the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act of 1998 (COPPA). NCCA will address record compliance with a records management program that addresses creation, maintenance, storage, and final destination of records in accordance with North Carolina laws and regulations.

#### Exceptional Children's Education Programming

1. *Describe the educational programs, strategies, and additional supports the school will provide to ensure a full continuum of services for students with disabilities.*
2. *Describe the methods and support systems that will be in place to ensure students with disabilities receive a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE).*
3. *Describe how implementation of the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) will be monitored and reported to the student, parents and relevant staff.*
4. *Describe the proposed plan for providing related services.*

#### Full Continuum of Services

Virtual schools open up a vast range of possibilities and options for the delivery of the full continuum of special education and related services to eligible students. Services for students with disabilities (according to students' needs) include, but are not limited to:

- \* Consultative support to the general education teachers to provide 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

\* Direct related service support (e.g., speech-language, occupational or physical therapy, and psychological counseling) provided face-to-face, via computer, or 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

\* Regular progress reporting to parents at least as frequently as general education progress reporting

\* Careful logging in Connexus of every conversation (by phone, WebMail message, LiveLesson session, or other means) 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

#### Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

The school will comply with all state and federal policies regarding enrollment of special education students. NCCA will have methods and support systems in place to ensure students with disabilities receive a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). NCCA will enroll any student with an IEP. During the enrollment phase and after an enrollment lottery is held, if one is necessary, Connections and NCCA staff will request any special education documentation from the parents or prior school district and then review each IEP to determine the level of each student's needs and consider the types of services that are required. NCCA's Special Education department will work closely with the general education teachers to ensure that every student is included with their non-disabled peers and has access to the general education curriculum to the maximum extent possible.

NCCA will include the following statement on its public website: "Federal law requires North Carolina Connections Academy to provide its students, regardless of disability, with an equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from the school's education program. We provide students with accessibility through resources tailored to each student's individual abilities and needs, including assistive technologies and individualized support. If your student is in need of assistance in order to fully participate in North Carolina Connections Academy's education program, please contact the school's special education director at (phone number will be inserted) or the school's 504 coordinator at (phone number will be inserted). You can also obtain 24-hour technical support by calling the Accessibility Hotline at 888-639-5960.

#### Implementing an IEP

NCCA staff will request and review the existing IEP during the enrollment process to being the process of providing required services. Upon enrollment, NCCA will provide special education services equivalent to those in the student's IEP from the previous district. After enrollment, NCCA will hold an IEP team meeting consisting of the parent, the student when age appropriate, a school administrator or designee, the special education teacher, and a general education teacher to amend the IEP to reflect the



student's needs in a virtual environment.

After the IEP team meeting is held, the existing IEP will be adopted or amended, and any changes will be documented in accordance with applicable federal and state laws. Parents will be provided with the IEP amendment and written notice of any changes as well as parental rights. IEP information will not be required prior to an enrollment lottery, if one is necessary due to excess demand. Special education services will be provided in the virtual special education classroom as well as through co-teaching in the general education classroom according to the student's least restrictive environment.

The Manager of Special Education will facilitate annual reviews including transition plans. In accordance with state and federal IDEA regulations, with parental consent, students will be reevaluated every three years. Parents may request up to one new evaluation per year at NCCA's expense. After the reevaluation, an IEP team will develop a new IEP. Meetings may be held at the teaching/learning center, at a mutually agreeable site, by telephone, or by LiveLesson session and parental agreement will be obtained.

#### Providing Related Services

In addition to the regular placement activities, the Manager of Special Education (or designee) will review each IEP and Evaluation Report, 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. Parents will be active participants in the IEP meetings and will be provided with Prior Written Notice detailing the decisions of the IEP team.
- \* Hold annual reviews of the IEP, including reviewing student progress within the existing IEP and creating new IEP goals.
- \* Provide a Manager of Special Education, a qualified administrator to oversee and participate in IEP meetings and all elements of the special education program.
- \* Conduct triennial reviews, with new assessments or records review as the team deems appropriate.

Training will be provided throughout the year to the Manager of Special Education and teachers.

A Connections mentor with experience in virtual school implementation of IDEA and corresponding state regulations will be assigned to the school. Connections will also provide extensive training for the school leadership team and the Manager of Special Education on identification and service delivery for students with disabilities.

NCCA will be committed to meeting the unique needs of all enrolled students. Through highly qualified and certified teachers and the personalized approach of learning for each student, and parental involvement, the Governing Board will be focused on student success, both academically and emotionally for each NCCA student.

As a public school, NCCA will, through its policies and procedures, comply with all applicable requirements of the IDEA Act, 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 (Section 504). NCCA will provide a free and 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

*Describe how the virtual charter school will do the following:*

- 1. Identify students with special needs as identified by the Child Find mandate within the virtual environment.*

*During the enrollment process and after an enrollment lottery is held, if one is necessary, parents will be asked if their student has or has had an IEP or Section 504 Plan. The answer to this question will alert the Manager of Special Education of the enrolled student. The student's cumulative physical files will also be examined closely upon receipt to determine if the student has an IEP or Section 504 plan. Both the IEP and the Section 504 plan will be implemented to the fullest extent possible until the SST meets within the North Carolina-prescribed timelines to adopt, amend, or create a new IEP or Section 504 plan.*

*If a student does not enroll with an IEP or Section 504 plan, and NCCA suspects that student requires special education services (based on teacher observation, assessment data, or parental concern) the following procedures will be initiated:*

*\* The student's teacher will utilize SSTAIR, NCCA's RTI model, to track the student's response to the implementation of multi-tiered instruction and interventions by skills and standards. The teacher will alert NCCA's multi-disciplinary SST and interventions, progress monitoring data, and strategies will be discussed. Parents will be made aware of the need for intervention through the student's Personalized Learning Plan. The teacher will collect data and document progress and lack thereof with Tier I interventions. If no progress is made, the teacher will refer the student to the SST and the SST will determine next steps.*

*\* If parents express concern about their student's educational progress and request a special education evaluation, the Child Find process will begin and NCCA will respond to the request for evaluation.*

*\* If it is determined that the student needs an evaluation, parental consent for the student evaluation will be requested via an assessment plan. Parents will be sent a copy of the Procedural Safeguards. The RTI process will continue.*

*\* When the signed parental consent is returned to NCCA, the appropriate evaluations will be arranged and conducted by an evaluator in close proximity to the student's home.*

*\* Once the evaluation is complete, parents will be invited to the multi-disciplinary evaluation 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, including post-secondary transition as appropriate, documenting student-specific accommodations and modifications and specially designed instruction according to all federal and state regulations.*

*\* If a student becomes ineligible or leaves the school, NCCA will ensure that all appropriate paperwork is submitted and/or appropriate documentation is forwarded to the new school.*

- 2. Provide specified services to the enrolled students with special needs regardless*

*of where the student resides within North Carolina.*

*Special education services will be provided to students with special needs, regardless of where the student resides, in several ways including but not limited to:*

- \* Consultative services by phone*
- \* Direct small group or 1-to-1 instruction via LiveLesson sessions*
- \* LiveLesson session-facilitated collaboration and co-teaching between the school's general education staff and special education teacher*

*Related services such as speech-language or occupational therapy will be provided virtually or face-to-face according to student needs through contracted services as required.*

*The individualized focus of a virtual school, along with the 1-to-1 learning environment, often has a positive impact on a student's 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. The IEP team will create an IEP based on the student's individual needs.*

*3. Hold Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings and where such meetings will occur.*

*IEP team meetings will be convened regularly as part of the annual review, triennial review, and IEP amendment process. Consistent with IDEA and state regulations, the IEP team will consist of the parent, the student when age-appropriate, the general education and special education teachers, school counselors, related service providers (as needed), and a school administrator or designee. When evaluations are reviewed, an expert with the ability to interpret evaluation results will also be included.*

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

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

NCCA will provide access to online content, curriculum, and instruction to all students. NCCA is committed to provide equal opportunity, equal treatment, and meet the obligations to make accommodations or modifications to avoid disability-based discrimination. NCCA will make every effort to abide by the federal regulations found in IDEA as well as Sections 504 and 508 of the Rehabilitation Act. With this in mind, it is NCCA's goal to include the following accessibility features over time:

- \* Students will be able to navigate their lesson content using only the keyboard.*
- \* The content and structure will be able to be understood by a student using a screen reader (e.g., JAWS, NVDA), a text reader (e.g., Snap and Read), or other types of assistive technology (e.g., voice recognition software or Dragon Naturally Speaking).*
- \* There will be text equivalents for non-test media. This includes captions and/or alternative descriptions and assessments for audio, video, images,*

and other forms of media.

\* As appropriate closed captioning and/or American Sign Language translation will be provided for LiveLesson sessions.

\* These features have been identified as the foundation of both the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines Version 2.0 Level AA and the Section 508 Technical Standards.

Connections provides an Accessibility Support Desk (888-639-5960). Students (including those who are vision-impaired, blind, deaf, and/or hard of hearing) can call the support desk and schedule appointments with the Accessibility Associate who will assist the student with access. Connections continuously reviews emerging technologies and resulting innovative learning tools in order to enhance ease of access.

*5. Provide information about how the charter school will accommodate non-English speaking students while also 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 English Language Learners (ELL students) through phone conferences and consultation with colleagues and Learning Coaches and direct instruction via LiveLesson sessions targeting reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Continuous progress monitoring will inform the level of support each student needs.

Once identified as an ELL student, the student will be provided support based on English proficiency level in ESL classes taught via LiveLesson sessions by a certified ELL teacher. Classes will be aligned to standards and based on scientific research for English language acquisition. The targeted and individualized instructional support provided in the LiveLesson sessions will focus on helping students attain English proficiency in reading, writing, listening, and speaking using SIOP.

In sheltered content classes based on the SIOP model, grade level content will be made comprehensible for ELL students. Teachers will promote developing academic language skills. In addition, the ELL Lead will work with the content teachers, Learning Coaches, and students to ensure content material is adapted and accessible for all ELL students.

## **Student Performance Standards**

- 1. Describe the student performance standards for the school as a whole.*
- 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.*
- 3. Explain the policies and standards for promoting students, including students with special needs, from one grade level to the next. Discuss how and when promotion criteria will be communicated to parents and students.*
- 4. Provide the public charter school's exit standards for graduating **ALL** students. These standards should set forth what students in the **last grade served** will know and be able to do. Be sure to include plans for the "At-Risk" population.*

The school's performance will be measured and communicated to parents via WebMail and the website, reported to the Governing Board periodically, and account for through an annual audit report to DPI.

#### State and Federal Accountability

Goal #1: NCCA will meet the Annual Measurable Objectives for students who are proficient in math or reading as defined by North Carolina's ESEA flexibility request.

Measure: Math and reading proficiency rates by subgroup.

Metric: Proficiency rates by subgroup.

Target and Rating Categories: These will be defined by North Carolina's ESEA flexibility request.

#### Student Progress Over Time

Goal #2: Returning student progress in reading and math as measured by state test results as compared to the previous year (where applicable).

Measure: Percent of returning students' (enrolled for state testing last year and this school year) whose state test scores will indicate proficiency or better, or will show improvement of at least one category in 4th-8th grade reading and math (e.g., from "Level 2" to "Level 3").

Metric: Percent of returning students' (enrolled for state testing last school year and this school year) whose state test scores will indicate proficiency or better, or will show improvement of at least one category in 4th-8th grade reading and math (e.g., from "Level 2" to "Level 3").

Target and Rating Categories: The annual target is 80% of Full Academic Year students who have taken the state tests this school year and the prior school year at NCCA who are proficient or who show improvement of at least one category. This cannot be reported until the second year the school is open. The school expects this to be a greater challenge during the initial four-year pilot as teachers gain an understanding of the particular needs of the students who have enrolled, and adjust its curriculum, instruction, and interventions to best address those needs.

#### Promotion

Goal #3: Full Academic Year students are successful in their coursework and are promoted to the next grade level.

Measure: Percent of Full Academic Year students will promote to the next grade (grades K-8) or earn at least one fourth of the required high school credits for a standard diploma in the school year (grades 9-12 as those grades are added to the school). This will be addressed as the end of the school year as compared with the beginning of the school year.

Metric: Percent of Full Academic Year students will promote to the next grade (grades K-8) or earn at least one fourth of the required high school credits for a standard diploma in the school year (grades 9-12 as those grades are added to the school). This will be assessed as of the end of the school year as compared with the beginning of the school year.

Target and Rating Categories: The annual target is 85% of Full Academic Year students who complete the school year. While the true goal is 100%, the school expects this to be a greater challenge during the initial four-year pilot as the school's academic rigor comes to be better understood by those seeking to enroll or enroll their students. (In the early years of a new virtual school, many believe the school will be "easy" and enroll, only to discover that it is a "real school" and this can depress the initial student promotion rate.)

The school's promotion and graduation policies will comply with North Carolina state requirements and will be spelled out in the handbook and approved by the Board.

**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.*

*Provide a draft copy of the student handbook specific to the proposed charter school within the appendices (Appendix D).*

*Be sure to include:*

- 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.*

The school will regard academic honesty as key to its mission. All students will be required to sign the Honor Code indicating their understanding of the expectations of academic honesty. 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. Cheating, plagiarizing, or other acts of academic dishonesty are directly counter to the principles of academic excellence and harm most those students who engage in such activities. They cheat themselves of the opportunity to fully develop their intellectual abilities. The Honor Code will serve to reinforce students' commitment to academic excellence and integrity, and all students must sign this Honor Code as part of the enrollment process. Students and parents suspected of inappropriate assessment behavior will be confronted immediately and subjected to standard disciplinary action.

The school will have a detailed student handbook (a draft is included in Appendix D). The handbook will include practices the school will use to promote effective discipline, a list of offenses which may result in suspension or expulsion, an explanation of the rights of students with disabilities, and policies and procedure for due process.

As a personalized, high-expectation virtual school, NCCA anticipates being able to effectively manage student discipline issues. In addition, the online curriculum will allow the school to minimize academic interruptions caused by suspensions; students may be expected to work regardless of their disciplinary status. The handbook includes a clear and fair code of conduct that complies with the students' due process rights and aligns with the school's mission.

Appropriate conduct will be expected of all students at NCCA. The students' code of conduct will include steps to be followed in the event of misbehavior. NCCA will establish and adopt suspension and expulsion policies

that will be distributed in the school handbook. NCCA's discipline, suspension, and expulsion policies will be in accordance with student's rights and with applicable law.

Reflected in the school handbook is careful protection of the rights of disabled students through the fair application of due process. School staff may order the removal of a student from school for disciplinary reasons to the extent the removal is applied to non-disabled students, as long as the removals do not constitute a change of placement. A change in placement occurs if the student is removed from school for disciplinary reasons for more than 10 consecutive school days or if the student is subjected to a series of removals that constitute a pattern of removal.

#### **IV. GOVERNANCE and CAPACITY**

(No more than ten total pages in this section)

**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.

##### **Governance:**

##### **Private Nonprofit Corporation:**

\*The nonprofit corporation must be officially authorized by the NC Secretary of State upon application submission.

*Name of Private Nonprofit:* North Carolina for Quality Virtual Educa

*Mailing Address:* 4 San Marcos Ave, Durham NC 27703

*City/State/Zip:* Durham NC 27703

*Street Address:* 4 San Marcos Ave

*Phone:* 919-638-7056

*Fax:* 919-287-2639

*Name of registered agent and address:*

Corporation Service Company  
327 Hillsborough Street  
Raleigh NC 27603

*FEDERAL TAX ID:* 45-4339430

##### **Tax-Exempt Status 501 (c)(3)**

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

Yes (copy of letter from federal government attached: Appendix E)

X No

**NOTE:** 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.

##### **Governance and Organizational Structure of Private Non-Profit Organization:**

The private nonprofit corporation is the legal entity that has 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.

##### **Operational Components**



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 the teaching/learning center (administrative office). However, NCCA has analyzed several locations, including potential shared/joint use facilities, based on criteria needed to support an effective virtual school and we've included information on 25 potential properties located in Raleigh/Cary and Durham (Appendix R) that could potentially serve as the teaching/learning center. Since a facility will not be needed until the fall of 2015, it is premature to perform a detailed analysis of facilities, as available rental properties may be significantly different in several months. Upon award of the charter, we will secure a facility within the requirements of the charter. A teaching/learning center for a virtual school requires minimal build out which can be accomplished in the time frame needed.*

2. *Describe 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.*

*The Governing Board will comply with North Carolina's Open Meeting and Public Meeting Law by ensuring that all meeting days and times are appropriately posted at the teaching/learning center, on the school's website, and published in any and all applicable ways for public information. Parents and the public will be welcome to attend and may address the Governing Board during the public comment period. The Governing Board may choose to meet telephonically per North Carolina Code of Laws 143-318.13. If a conference call will be held, public conference call information will be provided. Minute of Board meetings will be available to the public at all times via the school website.*

*The Governing Board plans to adopt a regular monthly meeting schedule. The public, included but not limited to key stakeholders such as parents, staff, and interested members of the public, will be notified through postings at the teaching/learning center and online, and will be encouraged to attend. The Governing Board plans to meet 10 times per year during the months school is in session.*

3. *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, and business and community leaders who are committed to bringing a high-quality, highly accountable virtual public school to North Carolina. The Governing Board consists of five members. Each Governing Board member brings unique skills and expertise to support NCCA and make decisions regarding the operation of the school, including budgeting, curriculum, and operating procedures. NCCA will be 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 of 2015.*

4. *Describe when and how this governing board will evaluate the virtual charter school vendor against measureable and specific standards to gauge progress with meeting the terms of the charter. Specifically address the protocol for the governing board decision to change vendors without significant disruption to the charter school's operations.*

*As outlined in the executed Educational Products & Services Agreement provided in Appendix L, the Governing Board is independent from Connections and has complete legal, fiduciary, and oversight authority of NCCA. More detail regarding the relationship, and the methods for the Board to evaluate Connections is provided in the Proposed Management Organization section of the application. The*

*Governing Board is responsible for the contractual relationship with Connections. The Governing Board will regularly review services received from Connections. Connections will be responsible for reporting to the Governing Board and will be answerable to the Governing Board. Furthermore, the Governing Board will conduct an annual review of Connections. The design, performance criteria, and methodology will be developed by the Governing Board in consultation with Board Counsel.*

*While the evaluation will be conducted annually, feedback from the Governing Board, the Principal, and interested parties is expected to be received by Connections on a routine and as needed basis to address the needs of the school and ensure the needs of the students are being met in a timely and thorough manner.*

*The Governing Board has the right to terminate its contract with Connections if it does not meet its performance obligations and is unable to cure such deficiency after being given reasonable notice. The Educational Products & Services Agreement describes the terms of termination and states that it is the prerogative and discretion of the Governing Board. After considerable review and negotiation by the Governing Board and Board Counsel, an Educational Products & Services Agreement has been signed and executed.*

*The Governing Board will evaluate Connections on an annual basis. The evaluation will include a review of Connections in the following areas: Educational Program, Technology, School Support Services, and Board Support Services at a minimum.*

5. *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 will be authorized by the State Board of Education to govern the school. The Governing Board and Board Legal Counsel were actively involved in negotiating the executed Educational Products & Services Agreement, as provided in Appendix L. Upon approval of the charter, the founding members may recruit additional members to form a diverse and well-balanced Governing Board.*

Please complete the table provided depicting the initial members of the nonprofit organization.

<b>Board Member Name</b>	<b>Board Title</b>	<b>County/State of Residence</b>	<b>Current Occupation</b>	<b>Past or Present Professional Licenses(s) Held</b>	<b>Has any disciplinary action been taken against any of these professional licenses?</b>

**Please provide the following in this location of the APPLICATION:**

1. *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 administrator.*

The Governing Board sets policy and hires contractors, including those providing curriculum, technology, 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 is legally responsible for all transactions of the school. The Governing Board will:

- \* Protect the legal interests of the school and set policy
- \* Set the vision/mission of the school and govern its operations
- \* Exercise sound legal and ethical practices and policies
- \* 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
- \* Develop 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

All Governing Board minutes will be made available on the school's website. Governing Board activities will be reported in the school newsletter.

"Effective boards recruit and supervise a lead administrator who can meet the school's missions and develop and define the roadmap for academic rigor."

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

NCCA's instructional leader will be the Principal, who is selected and employed by the Governing Board. 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 teach and facilitate the student instructional program.

The Governing Board has partnered with Connections via the Educational Products & Services Agreement (Appendix L) 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 recruiting teachers and staff. The search process will include a job posting, advertising for the position through multiple avenues, screening candidates, and identifying the top candidates for the Governing Board's consideration. Ideally, the Governing Board anticipates hiring a candidate by April 2015.

Data management of the school will be the Principal's responsibility; while overall governance will be the responsibility of the Governing Board. The Governing Board will annually evaluate the Principal based upon North Carolina law. Annual performance will be based upon meeting school goals, staff evaluations, and input from Connections based on their experience interacting with the Principal and supporting other successful virtual school programs nationwide. The Governing Board will approve staff compensation plans, performance criteria, a performance appraisal system,

and disciplinary procedures for all employees consistent with North Carolina law.

2. *Describe the size, current and desired composition, powers, and duties of the governing board. Identify key skills, areas of expertise, and constituencies that will be represented on 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 school leader; and c) there will be active and effective representation of key stakeholders, including parents.*

The Governing Board will be comprised of no fewer than five and no more than seven voting members serving staggered terms of one, two, or three years. No member of the Governing 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 application North Carolina and federal law. Furthermore, no Governing Board members will be employed by Connections, the school's educational services provider.

The officers of the corporation include a President, Treasurer, and Secretary. The Governing Board members are parents, educators, and business and community leaders who are committed to bringing a high quality, highly accountable virtual public school for students in grades K-12 to North Carolina. Current Governing Board members have unique skills and expertise in online education, technology, internal controls, and financial analysis. Additionally, at least one parent of an enrolled student will be recruited to join the Governing Board. These qualifications will help ensure the success of the school and the effective representation of key stakeholders.

Directors will be elected at a duly organized meeting of the Governing Board by a majority of the directors then in office. Directors will take office immediately at the annual meeting, or other meeting, at which they are elected. A Governing Board member will serve until a successor is identified. Members will be classified with respect to the time for which they hold office by dividing them into three classes, each class consisting of, as nearly as possible, an equal number of members. The members of the first class will hold office for an initial term of one year, and the members of the second class for an initial term of two years, and the members of the third class for an initial term of three years. At the close of each annual meeting, the successors to the class of members whose terms expire that year will commence to hold office for a term of three years, or until their successors have been identified. In the event of an increase in the number of Governing Board members, the remaining members will assign the newly created position to the appropriate class or classes so that the three classes continue to consist of, as nearly as possible, an equal number of members.

3. *Explain the procedure by which the founding board members have been recruited and selected. If a position is vacant, how and on what timeline will new members be recruited and added to the board?*

The Governing Board will recruit additional members as necessary to form a diverse and well-balanced Governing Board. Any member of the greater North Carolina community may seek appointment to the Governing Board, with the exception of employees of NCCA, its education services provider, or any person who has been convicted of a felony.

The Governing Board will aim to have a parent of an enrolled student on the

Governing Board once the school is open.

- 4. Outline the strategic board calendar detailing how often the board will meet according to the bylaws established.*

The Board will meet monthly. Special meetings may be called as necessary.

- 5. 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 J).*

Members of the Governing Board will have the opportunity to attend national conferences and training opportunities, including peer-to-peer networking events such as iNACOL and the National Public Charter School Conference as well as other training sessions conducted by independent board governance providers. Training topics included charter school basics, non-profit management, conflict of interest, budgeting and financial oversight, effective meetings, policy development, and human resources oversight. In addition, Governing Board members have participated in national conferences to network with other charter school board members and further their development as effective board members. Along with training, the Governing Board has attended several state meetings in preparation for the submission of this charter application. When the school is approved, the Governing Board expects to attend further trainings and meetings as may be appropriate to govern the school.

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

The Governing Board will adhere 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 conflicts of interest. In addition, the Governing Board has adopted a Conflict of Interest policy which requires annual completion of a Conflict of Interest Disclosure Statement. The Governing Board will seek to avoid any conflicts, expressed or implied, by thoroughly vetting Board Member candidates. Furthermore, when a potential conflict is brought to its attention, the Governing Board will seek guidance from Board Counsel and any and all other appropriate authorities to establish the necessary steps concerning the actual or perceived conflict of interest.

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

The operating structure will be similar to a traditional educational environment, with a Principal, selected and employed by the Governing Board, who will supervise administrative staff and teachers who will teach students and implement the curriculum. The need for new policies may be suggested by parents, the school staff, or others, but developing policies will be the responsibility of the Governing Board with advice from Board Counsel. The Governing Board will be well informed and routinely receive training regarding Charter School Law, SBE Policy and operating policies established by the SBE and implemented by DPI. Using this knowledge will enable the Governing Board to make appropriate policy decisions that will affect the operation of the school and the school and work environment for students and staff.

- 8. Discuss the school's grievance process for parents and staff members.*

Parent Grievance Resolution Process - The responsibilities will be set out

in the Parent/Legal Caretaker Agreement (PLCA) and the school handbook and include: contacting families regularly, delivering educational materials and equipment, and providing accessible support. NCCA will also ensure families and students adhere 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 the grievance process outlined in the handbook.

1. A parent with a grievance must, in writing, report the dissatisfaction, and submit it to the student's teacher (or other appropriate NCCA staff members as necessary). All parties involved must be appropriately defined and the problem must be clearly outlined.

2. The recipient of the grievance (generally the teachers) must review the issue with his/her supervisor (generally the Principal) and respond to the parent within three school days.

3. If the original recipient did not resolve the grievance, the parent should request a meeting with the recipient's supervisor. The supervisor should investigate the matter, and schedule a meeting with the parent, the student, if necessary, and any other staff members (if necessary), within five school days.

4. If either party does not resolve this grievance, the parent should then request a meeting with the school administration. School administration will investigate the matter and schedule a meeting within five school days.

5. If a resolution was not reached at the three meetings, the parent may request a meeting with the parent members of the Governing Board, who will investigate the matter, and arrange a meeting with five school days.

Employee Grievance Resolution Process - The Governing Board encourages open and direct lines of communication between employees at all levels of the organization. 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 supervisor; and regulatory compliance.

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

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

3. If the issue relates to a personnel matter or work condition, contact the Governing Board. After an employee fully describes the issue in writing, the

Governing Board will help the employees and supervisor consider how policies, procedures, and practices relate for the issue.

**Governance and Organizational Structure of Private Non-Profit Organization (continued)**

**Include in the Appendices:**

1. A well-defined organizational chart showing the relationship of the Board of Directors to the parents and staff of the proposed charter school. This chart should also include lines of authority to and from any 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). (Appendix F)
2. A one-page resume from each founding board member and responses to the questions found on the Charter School Board Member Form (Appendix G).
3. The proposed by-laws, which must include a Conflict of Interest Policy for board members and a stated commitment to the NC Open Meetings Law (Appendix H).
4. A copy of the articles of incorporation from the NC Department of the Secretary of State. (Appendix I)
5. Copy of any board policies if adopted already (Appendix J).
6. Copies of meeting minutes (if available), relevant to the development of the charter school plan, during the application process (Appendix K).

**Proposed Management Organization (Educational Management Organization or Charter Management Organization)**

*If the proposed school does not intend to contract with an education service provider, mark "Not Applicable" and follow the direction #3 in the Application Specifications.*

**Not Applicable**

If the Charter School plans to contract for services with an educational management organization (EMO) or charter management organization (CMO), please specify the contact information below.

Name of the Company: Connections Education  
Address: 1001 Fleet Street, 5th Floor  
Baltimore MD 21202  
Website: <http://www.connectionsacademy.com>  
Phone Number: 443-212-1934  
Contact Person: Jay W Ragley, Senior Director, State Relations  
Fax: 443-529-1200  
Email: [jragley@connectionseducation.com](mailto:jragley@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 school. Please include an executed copy of the management agreement as Appendix L of the specified EMO or CMO.*

The school has engaged Connections Academy of North Carolina, LLC, an affiliate of Connections Education, LLC, for curriculum, technology, and other support services in compliance with North Carolina statutes. The Governing Board will maintain responsibility for ensuring 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 Educational Products & Services Agreement,

Connections 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 with its obligation under the Educational Products & Services Agreement, as well as ensuring compliance with North Carolina statutes. A copy of the executed Educational Products & Services Agreement is in Appendix L of this application.

Connections is dedicated to providing high quality professional educational services to children of all backgrounds. Connections 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 the best-of-class materials from a 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' advanced technology allows a quality public education to be delivered straight into a student's home or other location. The curriculum allows for parent, student, and teacher input through a five-star rating system that allows for continuous school improvement.

2. *What other EMO/CMOs were pursued and why did the applicant select this particular one?*

*Please include information regarding other management organization's fees and financial/academic records that led to the selection of the proposed EMO/CMO as the best fit for this proposed school.*

The Governing Board conducted due diligence evaluating the need for an Education Service Provider. The Governing Board selected Connections 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' fiscal responsibility and experience developing fiscally-responsible and sustainable best practices.

While at NCVPS, Bryan Setser, Board President, worked with multiple vendors. He has spent the past four years researching potential partners. His most positive interactions were with Connections 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. Each Governing Board member had the opportunity to provide other Governing Board members with his/her independent findings throughout the process before the Governing Board made a unified decision.

Connections has a proven record of success in collaborating with public virtual schools, consistent strong ratings from parents, proven acceptance of students to highly regarded colleges and universities, positive relationships with strong governing boards, and passionate testimonials from families about their successful experiences. Connections will be a critical partner in achieving the school's mission of providing parents a choice for their children throughout the state who need an alternative to the traditional public school classroom to achieve their goals.

3. *Provide and discuss student performance, governance performance and financial data from other schools managed by the management company to demonstrate how this organization is a*



*good fit for the targeted student population. Nationally, what is the highest and lowest performing school of the EMO/CMO? Why are these two schools so different in overall achievement?*

School Ratings (2012-2013):

\* Capistrano Connections Academy (CapoCA) improved its statewide Academic Performance Index (API) rating from 2011-2012 to 2012-2013. API is a cross-sectional look at the student achievement based on an improvement model using assessment results from one year that are compared to assessment results from the prior year to measure improvement. Each school has an annual target, and all numerically significant student groups at a school also have targets. The API requires student group accountability to address the achievement gaps that exist between traditionally higher- and lower-scoring student groups.

\* California Connections Academy @ Ripon (CalCAR) scored over an 800 on the statewide API rating in the first year of operation exceeding California's target of 800.

\* Idaho INSPIRE outperformed all other state virtual charter schools.

\* Oregon Connections Academy (OCA) received a level 4 rating for growth (2nd highest rating) and outperformed all other virtual schools in the state and outperformed the state average in reading and writing.

\* Texas Connections Academy @ Houston (TCAH) was the only virtual school in Texas with a state rating of "Met Standard." TCAH is the only virtual school in Texas with a Distinction Earned for academic performance in any area (English Language Arts).

\* Wisconsin Connections Academy (WCA) made AYP every year from 2005-2006 through 2010-2011 (not rated in 2011-2012). For the 2012-2013 school year, WCA received a rating of Exceeds Expectations (4th highest out of 5 possible ratings).

#### State Results Highlights

##### Math (2012-2013)

\* Florida Virtual School Full-Time (full time K-8) students exceeded or were equivalent to public school students statewide at all middle school grades.

\* TCAH exceeded statewide performance in 7th grade math.

##### Reading (2012-2013)

\* Arizona Connections Academy (ACA) students exceeded or were equivalent to public school students statewide at 6 out of 7 tested grade levels.

\* CapoCA students exceeded or were equivalent to public school students statewide at 9 out of 10 tested grade levels (Grades 2-11).

\* Florida Virtual School Full Time (Connections is a provider for K-8) students exceeded or were equivalent to public school students statewide at all tested grade levels.

\* Indiana Connections Academy (INCA) students exceeded or were equivalent to public school students statewide at 6 out of 7 tested grade levels.

\* Ohio Connections Academy (OCA) students exceeded the Ohio state standard (75.0% proficiency) at 6 out of 7 tested grade levels.

\* South Carolina Connections Academy (SCCA) students exceeded or were equivalent to public school students statewide at 6 out of 7 tested grade levels.

\* TCAH students exceeded or were equivalent to public school students statewide at all tested grade levels (3-8).

Math Comparison (2012-2013)

\* Georgia Connections Academy (GACA) improved performance at 5 out of 6 grade levels (3-8).

\* Florida Virtual School Full-Time (Connections is a provider for K-8) improved performance at each of grades 6, 7, and 8.

\* TCAH improved performance in 5 out of 6 tested grade levels (3-8).

A description of the highest and lowest performing schools is provided in the Virtual Historical Context section of this application. The highest performing virtual charter schools supported by Connections in school year 2013-2014 were in the states of Wisconsin and Louisiana. Using student proficiency levels in the foundational subjects of reading and math, the school Connections supports in New Mexico does not exceed most state averages. The school supported by Connections in Georgia does not exceed most state averages in math, but does meet or exceed state averages in reading.

4. *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.*

In accordance with and as set forth in the Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws, the Governing Board will hold the charter and will be responsible for governing NCCA. Employees of NCCA or Connections will not serve on the Governing Board.

The Governing Board will govern independently of Connections and maintain responsibility for ensuring that the school 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.

The Governing Board will employ all school personnel and will make all decisions in employment matters, following the school's employee handbook, which the Governing Board will review, revise, and approve. The Governing Board has contracted with Connections to provide human resources and payroll services, including background checks required by law and regulations.

The Governing Board will ensure that the school adheres to health, safety, civil rights, and disability rights requirements. The Governing Board will also be responsible for ensuring 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.

The Governing Board is an entity completely independent from Connections.

Upon filing of a Form 1023 Application for 501(c)(3) status (submitted on, the IRS began a rigorous review of the organization in order to make a decision to award tax exempt status to the charter school corporation. NCCA is not related to nor is it a partner of a holding company system; it is a non-profit entity controlled and governed by the Governing Board that does not include, and will never include, an employee or former employee of Connections. By conferring this status to NCCA, the IRS will further validate the independence of the corporation.

5. *Provide a description of the relationship that will exist between the charter school employees and the Management Organization.*

The operating structure will be similar to a traditional educational environment, with a Principal, approved and employed by the Governing Board, who will supervise administrative staff and teachers who teach students and implement the curriculum according to policies and procedures. The Governing Board will employ all school personnel. The Governing Board has contracted with Connections for human resources and payroll services.

6. *Explain how the contract includes measurable objectives whereby the charter school board can evaluate annually the performance of the EMO/CMO; and if necessary, terminate the contract without significant obstacles.*

The Governing Board has the right to terminate the contract with Connections if Connections does not meet its performance obligations and is unable to cure such deficiency after being given reasonable notice. The Educational Products & Services Agreement describes in detail the terms of termination and states that it is clearly the prerogative and discretion of the Governing Board.

The Governing Board manages the school and maintains all oversight and accountability responsibilities. The Governing Board employs the school principal and staff. The Governing Board will be responsible for the management and oversight of Connections. The Governing Board will regularly review services and will set expectations for reporting. The design, performance criteria, and the methodology will be developed by the Governing Board in consultation with Connections, where appropriate, and Board Counsel.

The Governing Board will evaluate Connections on measurable objectives. The Governing Board will evaluate Connections on an annual basis. The evaluation will include a review of Connections, at a minimum, in the following areas: Educational Program, Technology, School Support Services, and Board Support Services.

7. *Is the facility provided by the EMO/CMO? N*
  - If yes, include as Appendix M a detail of the buyout formula for the nonprofit board of directors to purchase the facility if a buyout formula or process exists.
8. *List the fund balance and surpluses for each school managed by the EMO/CMO over the last three years in North Carolina.*

Connections has not previously managed any schools in North Carolina. Therefore, this questions is not applicable.

9. *Provide as Appendix N the financial history and statements of the EMO/CMO over the last three years. Specifically, if contracting with an EMO provides confirmation that the EMO is in good financial standing with either financial statements, bank letter, D & B report or credit rating.*

## **Virtual Historical Context**

**Failure to provide this information will result in disqualification.**

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

During its 12+ years of operation, Connections has developed its own methods of online teaching that have enabled them to produce the highest academic

performance of any family of K-12 virtual schools in the country. In looking at state standardized tests, students attending statewide virtual schools supported by Connections tend to perform about their state averages in reading and on par in science (based on the percentage of schools supported 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). All results are those publicly reported by the states on their standardized tests, not based on any measures of Connections.

\* CapOCA improved its statewide Academic Performance Index (API) rating from 2011-2012 to 2012-2013. API is a cross-sectional look at the student achievement based on an improvement model using assessment results from one year that are compared to the assessment results from the prior year to measure improvement. Each school has a target, and all numerically significant student groups at a school also have targets. The API requires student group accountability to address the achievement gaps that exist between traditionally higher - and lower-scoring student groups.

\* CalCAR scored over an 800 on the statewide API rating in the first year of operation (2012-2013) exceeding California's target of 800.

\* Idaho INSPIRE outperformed all other state virtual charter schools (2012-2013).

\* ORCA received a level 4 rating for growth (2nd highest rating) and outperformed all other virtual schools in the state and outperformed the state average in reading and writing (2012-2013).

\* TCAH was the only virtual school in Texas with a state rating of "Met Standard." TCAH is the only virtual school in Texas with a Distinction Earned for academic performance in any area (English Language Arts 2012-2013).

\* WCA made AYP every year from 2005-2006 through 2010-2011 (not rated in 2011-2012). For the 2012-2013 school year, WCA received a rating of Exceeds Expectation (the 4th highest rating out of 5 possible ratings).

Schools supported by Connections 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 school supported by Connections is conducted. Year after year, parents express their satisfaction. Results from the 2014 survey include:

\* 89.2% gave the overall online school program an "A" or a "B" grade

\* 91.9% recommended the school to other parents

\* 90.4% reported that their children are making good academic progress

\* 95.6% said they were pleased with the helpfulness of their child's teachers and specifically praised their responsiveness and accessibility

\* 94.7% considered the curriculum of high quality

\* 93.4% agree that technology tools improve their child's learning experience

Virtual school are not always sought as a long term solution by students and

families. Often families leave when the problem that drove them to find an alternative educational setting is resolved.

- 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 signed management agreement with all fees clearly provided should be attached as Appendix L.*

Connections Education (formerly known as Connections Academy) is a for-profit entity and was formed in October 2001 to serve schools and students in the emerging K-12 virtual school market. The company has operated in a fiscally-sound manner throughout its history. 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 an incredible source of curriculum and instruction products and services, it also provides Connections with the financial resources to support its growth and that of the schools and students it serves.

The Governing Board is confident that the budget information contained in the application has been prepared in a conservative fashion and incorporates the expected expenses 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.*

Using the most recent publicly available data (2013-2014) and two schools supported by Connections in South Carolina and Wisconsin, a comparison between these schools, their authorizing districts, and other virtual charter schools is found herein. The online application system prevents us from providing this information in a table format.

#### Wisconsin

The school exceeded the pass rates of its authorizing district in 13 out of 23 comparisons with its results excluded from the district's performance. This includes assessments in language arts, reading, math, science, and social studies in grades 3-8 and high school. In math, it exceeded district pass rates in grades 3 and 5. In reading, it exceeded district pass rates at all tested grade levels. In science, it exceeded district pass rates at grade 8. In social studies, it exceeded district pass rates at grades 8 and 10. In language arts, it exceeded district pass rates in grade 8.

The school's pass rate was higher in 21 out of 23 comparisons relative to other virtual charter schools. It was compared to six other virtual charter schools serving at least 200 students and similar grade spans. The combined performance of these other virtual charter schools was expressed as an average pass rate weighted by the number of students who tested for each program.

The school's enrollment was 90% Caucasian and 10% minority student groups, similar to state demographics. Approximately 26.8% of students were eligible for free or reduced school food programs. The authorizing school district is responsible for providing services to students with disabilities.

The school's student-to-teacher ratio was 38:1, ranking 2nd lowest among the seven virtual schools with at least 200 students enrolled.

Teacher retention data and student withdrawal data is not reported to the state or authorizing district. It is not publicly available for other virtual charter schools.

#### South Carolina

The school exceeded the pass rates of its authorizing district in 15 out of 32 comparisons with its results excluded from the district's performance. This includes assessments in English language arts, writing, math, science, and social studies in grades 3-8 and high school. In math, it exceeded district pass rates in grades 7 and 8 and high school. In English language arts, it exceeded district pass rates at all tested grade levels except for grades 3 and 4. In science, it exceeded district pass rates for grades 6, 7, and 8. In writing, it exceeded the district pass rates in grades 7 and 8.

The school's pass rate was higher in 26 out of 32 comparisons relative to all other virtual charter schools. The combined performance of these other virtual charter schools was expressed as an average pass rate weighted by the number of students who tested for each program.

The school's student enrollment was 79% Caucasian and 21% minority student groups; approximately 43.4% of students were eligible for free and reduced school food programs; 9.2% are students with disabilities. It is comparable (+/-5%) to its authorizer's district percentages on these metrics.

The following data is from 2012-2013 because 2013-2014 data is not publicly available.

The school's student-to-teacher ratio was 37:1. This is the 3rd lowest ratio among all virtual charter schools.

The schools' teacher retention rate was 87.2%. This is the highest rate among all virtual charter schools and greater than the authorizing district's rate.

Student withdrawal data is not reported to the state or authorizing district. It is not publicly available for other virtual charter schools.

Both schools have operated in a fiscally prudent manner. Both have undergone annual independent financial audits and have received 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.*

The highest performing virtual charter schools supported by Connections in school year 2013-2014 were in the states of Wisconsin and Louisiana. Using student proficiency levels in the foundational subject of reading and math, both schools meet or exceed most state averages.

In Wisconsin, school staff uses student data to identify students for targeted interventions by implementing Connections' multi-tiered intervention model for non-mastered skills and standards. Students have access to resources they need and teachers track progress through intervention indicators displayed on the Teacher Home Page in Connexus. Teachers also utilize Assessment Objective Performance Reports (AOPRs) receiving real-time student performance data on essential skills and standards based upon individual math and language arts assessment items.

The Louisiana school has a funding level which allows the school to be flexible to student needs and the culture of the Louisiana school staff is very student- and data-centric. The school has successfully implemented Connections SSTAIR instructional model. Progression Plans, automated in Connexus, define and track requirements that must be accomplished to meet a goal. Teachers and counselors use four-year academic progression plans for students to ensure they are on target for graduation and for meeting their college and career goals. The school makes full use of the academic support and intervention tools that Connections offers, and has used the flexibility provided by the funding to procure academic intervention tools. The school has built a strong relationship with state agencies and works hard to implement the state's rigorous truancy policies.

Using student proficiency levels in the foundational subjects of reading and math, the school in New Mexico does not exceed most state averages. The school in Georgia does not exceed most state averages in math, but does meet or exceed state averages in reading.

The school in New Mexico completed its first year of operation in 2013-2014. It received late approval, leaving little time for planning, which complicated many aspects of the school opening process including staffing. To increase student proficiency and growth, the school has implemented the following strategies for this school year:

- \* Students who are not proficient based on the state assessment or one of the school's formative assessments are placed in an intervention that will be closely monitored by the student's teachers.
- \* More staff resources have been assigned in math and reading (e.g., an interventionist to support content area teachers and reduced class sizes in English Language Arts and math)
- \* Each teacher is required to participate in a Professional Learning Community (PLC) that has a SMART goal related to student academic achievement.
- \* More credit recovery opportunities are being made available for students who enroll in the school already credit deficient.

To increase student proficiency and growth, the school in Georgia is implementing the following strategies for this school year:

- \* Teachers provide daily LiveLesson sessions to math students to better support their efforts to master required material.
- \* The school is using improved RTI process and improvements in the tracking process for students who are assigned alternative programming (Tier III students).
- \* The school now has a credit recovery specialist to support the efforts of credit-deficient students.

## **Projected Staff:**

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

The budget documentation includes detail regarding staffing, positions, and anticipated estimated salary ranges.

NCCA anticipates the following staffing levels based on anticipated enrollment.

Principal - 1 in Years 1, 2, 3 & 4

Assistant Principals - 2 in Year 1; 3 in Years 2 & 3; and 4 in Year 4

Administrative Assistants - 4 in Year 1; 5 in Years 2 & 3; and 6 in Year 4

Teachers - 23 in Year 1; 41 in Year 2; 49 in Year 3; and 59 in Year 4

Manager of Counseling - 1 in Years 1, 2, 3 & 4

Advisory Teachers/School Counselors - 2 in Year 1; 3 in Year 2; 4 in Year 3; and 6 in Year 4

Manager of Special Education - 1 in Years 1, 2, 3, and 4

Special Education Teachers - 4 in Years 1 and 2; 5 in Year 3; and 6 in Year 4

## **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.*

Virtual learning requires an additional skill set and professional development for educators. The Governing Board has contracted with Connections to provide Human Resources services. Connections, in coordination with the Board, will ensure job candidates (as part of the interview process) have the ability to personalize education for students and have a high level of comfort with technology. Qualifications for teachers will include North Carolina certification, when required, and a passion for innovation in teaching. In partnering with Connections, high-quality teachers knowledgeable in their content areas will be attracted to join the team. Connections' professional development will provide teachers 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 nonprofit board. Provide as Appendix O, a draft of the 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, employed by the Governing Board, who will supervise administrative staff and teachers who teach students and implement the curriculum according to policies and procedures set by the Governing Board. The Principal will be responsible for implementing 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 Connections, as the Governing Board's contracted Human



Resources provider, with oversight and approval by the Governing Board.

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. A draft of employment policies is included in Appendix O.

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

NCCA has developed personnel policies and procedures regarding the hiring and terminating of employees and 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 students or the school.

If it is found after employment begins that any information provided on the application was false or misleading, or that information could be detrimental to NCCA was withheld during the interview and/or hiring process, employment may be terminated.

Employees who are arrested or convicted of a felony or misdemeanor or offense must immediately, within one business day of returning to work after the arrest or conviction, notify the Principal as this could directly impact his/her ability to perform his/her job, or could have a negative impact on NCCA. An employee that has been arrested or convicted of a felony or misdemeanor during employment that impacts his/her ability to perform his/her job, or has a negative impact on NCCA, may receive disciplinary action up to and including termination.

A thorough performance management process will be implemented and followed, including a progressive disciplinary action process for policy violations and behavioral issues, and individual development plans to address performance issues that may arise. The Principal will review any recommendations for dismissal of personnel with Connections, as the Board's contracted Human Resources provider, who will ensure compliance with all policies and applicable employment laws.

4. *Outline the school's proposed salary range and employment benefits for all levels of employment.*

The budget documentation includes detail regarding staffing, positions, and anticipated estimated salary ranges.

For teaching positions, a salary range will be determined based on research of market compensation and financial considerations at the time of job posting. After the initial hire, compensation increases and incentives will be based on performance. Incentives will be based on individual and school performance. The budget provides 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%). Teachers will be offered a competitive salary and medical benefits. The employees will have access to retirement benefits. Employees will also receive paid time off (holidays and vacation), sick time, bereavement leave, overtime as appropriate, incentive compensation when appropriate, Social Security, Unemployment, and Workers Compensation.

Both salary increases and incentive considerations will be contingent on the fiscal performance of NCCA. All faculty and administrative evaluations will be aligned to North Carolina teacher and administrative evaluation systems, as required. 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 incentives will be based on performance. The budget provides estimated salaries by position. Incentives will be based on individual and school performance.

*5. Provide the procedures for employee grievance and/or termination.*

The Board encourages open and direct lines of communication between employees. The resolution process includes concerns about applying school policies and procedures within the school to staff, parents, and students; concerns about personnel decisions or decisions affecting other individuals at the school; work conditions; questions about the competence and overall fitness of a colleague or supervisor; and regulatory compliance.

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

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

3. If the issue relates to a personnel matter or work condition, contact Connections as the contracted human resources services provider, who will work with the Board. After an employee fully describes the issue in writing, Connections, with the oversight of the Board, will help the employee and supervisor consider how policies, procedures, and practices relate for the issue. Often, the policies in the handbook will dictate a resolution to the issue.

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

The Advisory Teacher/School Counselor will virtually assist students and

Learning Coaches with course selection and scheduling, and will be the initial point of contact for student concerns that span multiple subject areas as well as non-academic issues. The Advisory Teacher/School Counselor will become an expert on course and credit requirements and will work with the Manager of Counseling to establish counseling processes for students.

This position may be funded by local, state, or federal funds.

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, Special Education teachers, a Manager of Counseling, and Advisory Teachers/School Counselors. All staff will be qualified and certificated as required.

Manager of Special Education - 1 in Years 1, 2, 3, and 4

Special Education Teachers - 4 in Years 1 and 2; 5 in Year 3; and 6 in Year 4

Manager of Counseling - 1 in Years 1, 2, 3 & 4

Advisory Teachers/School Counselors - 2 in Year 1; 3 in Year 2; 4 in Year 3; and 6 in Year 4

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).*

The Governing Board understands the parameters of the virtual school pilot. The Board will ensure that the Principal is a North Carolina resident. The Board will also ensure that teaching staff will have the appropriate certification and 90% will reside in North Carolina. Further, within 30 days of hire, teachers will receive professional development in virtual instruction.

#### Principal

The Principal will manage teachers as they teach students and consult regularly with Learning Coaches and students, ensuring that each student successfully completes his/her instructional program. The Principal is responsible for the overall school operation working with parents, students, support staff, and certified teachers who teach a virtual instruction program.

\* North Carolina resident

\* Administrative credential required

\* Minimum of five years of teaching experience and some administrative or management experience

\* Advanced degree is preferred

#### Assistant Principal

The Assistant Principal will work closely with the Principal. He/she will manage all of the site-based, non-academic school operations. Additionally, he/she will work closely with the enrollment, technical support, materials management, fulfillment, finance, human resources, payroll, and facilities management functions.

\* Administrative credential preferred

\* Minimum of five years of relevant work experience

\* Relevant advance degree is preferred

#### Administrative Assistant

The Administrative Assistant will be responsible for such daily administrative tasks of the school as answering the phones and email, receiving visitors, assisting the Principal and teachers with filing and other duties as assigned.

- \* Ability to multitask
- \* Good interpersonal skills and attention to detail

#### Teachers

Certified teachers will teach students in a virtual learning environment and support the instructional program. Through the use of the telephone, Internet, and various curriculum tools, teachers will instruct students and consult regularly with Learning Coaches to ensure that each student successfully completes his/her instructional program.

- \* Highly qualified and certified to teach in North Carolina (appropriate to grade level responsibilities and to the extent required by law)
- \* Proficient using online meeting applications and data analysis applications
- \* Student-focused approach

#### Manager of Counseling

The Manager of Counseling will work in conjunction with the school's leadership team to help students, ensuring that each student successfully completes his/her instructional program. The manager will provide direction to staff and will assist students and parents in understanding and meeting graduation requirements, course selection and scheduling, post-secondary school planning, and crisis intervention.

- \* Minimum of three years of counseling experience in a secondary school setting preferred
- \* North Carolina Counseling Credential endorsement preferred
- \* Advanced degree
- \* Student-focused approach

#### Advisory Teacher/School Counselor

The Advisory Teacher/School Counselor will virtually assist students and Learning Coaches with course selection and scheduling and will be the initial point of contact for student concerns that span multiple subject areas as well as non-academic issues. The Advisory Teacher/School Counselor is an expert on course and credit requirements and will work with the Manager of Counseling to establish counseling processes for students.

- \* North Carolina teacher certification in a secondary content area or grade level
- \* Student-focused approach
- \* Excellent attention to detail and organization skills

#### Manager of Special Education

The Manager of Special Education, who reports to the Principal, will oversee all aspects of educational service delivery for students with special education needs. The manager will ensure that the school operates in compliance with all state and federal regulations.

The manager will ensure data is being collected, stored, and updated in a manner that meets all compliance expectations.

The manager will ensure that the school is providing appropriate programs in

the least restrictive environment for all students with special needs. This will include managing the pre-referral and IEP processes, maintaining student data, communicating with parents, locating and contracting with service providers throughout the state, and ensuring that the school operates in compliance with special education law and procedures at all times. The manager may also have a reduced teaching load.

- \* Master's degree in special education or related education field
- \* Valid special education credential in North Carolina preferred
- \* Teaching experience in special education
- \* Expertise in special education law and compliance
- \* Student-focused approach
- \* Experienced in IDEA policy and/or administration with special education

#### Special Education Teachers

The special education teacher will virtually teach students with special needs and manage instructional programs for students with special needs. Through the use of the telephone, Internet, and various curriculum tools, he/she will teach students and regularly consult with Learning Coaches and students to ensure that each student successfully completes his/her instructional program. The special education teacher will participate in all steps of the IEP process. He/she will work closely with other teachers and district/state professionals to ensure that the school's special education program is successful and operating in compliance with federal and state regulations. The special education teacher will utilize technology to deliver virtual instruction and teach students.

- \* Degree in special education or related education field
- \* Valid special education credential in North Carolina
- \* Excellence in IDEA policy and/or administration with special education
- \* Student-focused approach

#### **Staff Evaluation and Professional Development**

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

All certificated employees will be responsible for maintaining licensure and will be required to fulfill any professional development mandated by North Carolina to maintain a valid license. Certification and renewal will be monitored.

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 matches with the projected staff and funding of the proposed budget section.*

Teachers will participate in a performance evaluation system aligned to teaching standards, school goals, and student performance. The purpose of the performance evaluation system is to create a high performing 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.

Through ongoing teacher training and professional development, participation in professional learning communities, peer review, and varied career ladder opportunities, teachers will be effective and consistently focused on student learning and continuous improvement. Instructional leaders will utilize data provided through Connexus and the state accountability system

to drive professional development both for individual teachers and the school as a whole.

Teachers (and other staff) will be evaluated by the Principal and/or managers. Instructional staff will be observed on a regular basis and evaluated using a comprehensive, multi-layered systems. The teacher evaluation system may include the following and will be aligned to North Carolina teacher evaluation systems:

- \* Parent feedback on overall responsiveness, effectiveness, knowledge, and skills
- \* Evaluations of performance on core teaching competencies from observations of Learning Coach/student interaction, including LiveLesson sessions and evaluations of performance on student achievement metrics
- \* Achievement of overall school goals

Supporting the Principal in making the transition to a virtual setting will be critical for the success of the school. It involves the support of a number of individuals and resources. With Governing Board approval through the agreement with Connections, the Principal will be supported by providing a mentor (an experienced virtual school leader who will work with the Principal 1-to-1) for the first year. In addition, the Principal will participate in a two- year onboarding program in the form of Boot Camp 101 and Boot Camp 201. Both of these programs are directed by one or more of Connections' Directors of Schools who conduct monthly training sessions focused on many critical topics centered on tasks the new leader needs to know how to perform, resources to help the new leader in his/her daily work, and best practices to help the new leader be the instructional leader of the school.

The Principal Orientation Course and Program handbook was created so that the Principal will learn the same content that the teachers learn in the Teacher Orientation Course while also learning how to be a successful school leader. Additional training will also be provided in the form of manager training (e.g., students in distress) on an ongoing, as needed basis.

The Principal evaluation system may include the following and will be aligned to North Carolina administrator evaluation systems:

- \* Parent feedback
- \* Aggregate student achievement data captured by Connexus
- \* Evaluation of the competencies of a school leader including school culture, leadership, communications, data management, time management, personnel management, and instructional leadership
- \* Achievement of overall school goals

The Principal will be evaluated by the Governing Board in coordination with the Connections' Director of Schools. 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. *Describe the core components of professional development plan and how these components will support effective implementation of the educational program. Describe the extent to which professional development will be conducted internally or externally and will be individualized or uniform.*

The Principal, or designated member of the school leadership team, will be

responsible for ensuring all staff members attend professional development sessions. The Principal, supported by Connections, will establish the school's year-long professional development calendar, send session reminders along with any required pre-work, and track staff attendance. The Principal can pull real-time reports in Connexus that identify which teachers attended a session, whether they attended live (online) or watched the session recording, and review the artifact that each teacher uploaded as part of the post-assignment.

Teachers' professional development will be critically important in ensuring that the staff is optimally effective in teaching in a virtual environment and addressing the North Carolina Essential State Standards and the Common Core State Standards in their daily instructional practice. The school will use the National Standards for Quality Online Teaching published by the International Association for K12 Online Learning (iNACOL) ([http://www.inacol.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/iNACOL\\_CourseStandards\\_2011.pdf](http://www.inacol.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/iNACOL_CourseStandards_2011.pdf)) and the Connections Core Standards for Facilitating Student Learning, as guides for pinpointing necessary teacher skills and professional development requirements.

Connections will support NCCA by providing both online and face-to-face teacher training, beginning prior to the first day of school and ongoing throughout the year. Teachers will also have access to a variety of print and recorded resources to support their teaching and learning.

At the direction of the Governing Board, Connections will provide NCCA with teacher orientation courses and a minimum of eight additional professional development sessions throughout the year. In addition, Connections will support specific professional development needs as determined by the Principal.

- 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 and instructional methods within 30 days of hire.*

#### Initial and Returning Teacher Orientation Course

Within the first 30 days of being hired or starting a new school year, all teachers and the Principal will complete either the Teacher Orientation Course (for new teachers) or the Returning Teacher Orientation course (for returning teachers) and Exploring Your Courses. The courses are delivered through Connexus and contain lessons, assessments, and links to the online tutorials. The focus of these courses is to prepare teachers using the Connexus platform.

#### 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 with materials, guidance, and relevant topics. The focus of this training will be best practices in an online environment and 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. New updates to Connexus, interventions, and data dashboards for the school year will also be included.

### School Support Help Desk

To support NCCA staff, Connections will provide assistance during the hours of 8:00 AM to 8:00 PM Eastern Time during the academic year. Education professionals trained in the delivery of online curriculum are available to the Principal and the teaching staff to provide additional education support services regarding instructional delivery and curriculum services. In addition, support for professional development and special education/gifted education is available between 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM Eastern Time.

In addition to a more national PLC process, the school staff will also be included in a PLC that will focus daily on student success. This process will promote a collaborative approach in helping students be successful. Support and instructional efforts are based on student outcomes.

Connections provides a systematic, multi-year professional development program for all staff. Topics for professional learning are identified based on student performance data, school goals, national initiatives in education, research-based best practices, and feedback received from teachers following each professional development session. Regular days/times will be set aside for teachers to devote to professional learning opportunities.

Following each session, teachers will be required to upload an artifact to their professional development e-portfolio. The artifact is intended to give teachers the opportunity to put what they learned during the session into practice. For example, after a session focusing on instructional strategies for at-risk students, teachers will be required to identify the data within Connexus that they will use to identify students who may be at risk and how this data will change their instructional planning and practices. Along with the artifact, the teacher will also submit a reflection of what they have learned from the session. Completion of the artifact and reflection will take approximately 30 minutes.

As a continuation of synchronous online profession development sessions, teachers will be expected to continue the conversation of session objectives within their vertical and horizontal PLCs. This allows for true application of new strategies and resources as teachers strive to personalize instruction and make data-driven decisions.

Professional development sessions will use evaluation surveys and collaborative tools to elicit teacher and administrator feedback. Audits, evaluations, and site visits will be used to gauge the effectiveness of the training and to ensure initiatives are implemented with high fidelity.

### **Enrollment and Marketing:**

Reaching the full capacity for enrollment will be critical to obtain the necessary financial resources to keep your school viable and operating efficiently. In addition, it is required by law that charter schools provide equal access to all students. Read the charter school state statute regarding admissions GS 115C.238.29F(g) (1-7) carefully.

### **Marketing Plan**



*Marketing to potential students and parents is vital to the survival of a charter school. 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 state.*

Student recruitment and enrollment policies need to be balanced with the mutual goals of ensuring that families are aware of this educational option and the competing demand of being fiscally conservative. NCCA has an active base of interested families that have already reached out to the Connections 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 and Email: NCCA will conduct direct mail campaigns announcing the school to families 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 by phone. NCCA will also use email to supplement physical mail campaigns. Email messages contain information on how the program works, invitations to attend information sessions, and enrollment. Email also is used to communicate with families during the enrollment process.

\* Information Sessions: NCCA will conduct multiple information sessions in person, online, and pre-recorded. Sessions will be held across the state to assure that families from a variety of communities are able to attend. NCCA will educate families about the school and provide a complete array of information, including its curriculum, teaching methods, technology resources, and testing requirements. Throughout 2013 and 2014, 48 information sessions were held in North Carolina communities.

\* Website: Connections will create and maintain a website for 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/email information service: NCCA will launch and maintain a toll-free information line and an email information service to answer parents' questions.

\* Community and Youth Service Partnerships: NCCA will attend events and conduct grassroots outreach activities such as informational family gatherings and other locally based initiatives. This may include providing information about the school to youth-serving organizations such as Boys and Girls Club, parent groups, health-related organizations, and organizations for young actors, dancers, and athletes.

\* Media Outreach: NCCA will make use of paid and earned media, including press releases, and ads in local newspaper or radio, and possibly on television.

\* 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.

\* 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 find this high quality charter school. In addition, NCCA will benefit from Facebook, Twitter, and other social media outreach conducted by parent advocates.

Critical stages in the process include:

- \* Pilot application process (September 2014-October 2014)
- \* Selection process (October 2014-January 2015)
- \* Planning Period (January 2015-June 2015)
- \* Initial Enrollment (March 2015-April 2015)
- \* Open Enrollment (April 2015-June 2016 if no lottery is required and seats are available)
- \* First 20 Days of School (Approximately August 2015)
- \* First Semester of School (August 2015-January 2016)
- \* Initial Enrollment/Enrollment Period for 2016-2017 school year (March 2016-April 2016)
- \* Open Enrollment (April 2016-June 2017 if no lottery is required and seats are available)
- \* Finalizing Plans and Expansion for Year 2 (May 216-August 2016)

### **Parent and Community Involvement**

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

NCCA values parental engagement. The Governing Board intends to maintain at least one parent representative among its members in the future. After the school is approved, the Board will open consideration for interested parents who would like to serve on the Board. Parents will serve as Learning Coaches and play an active role in the learning process, providing input, and communicating regularly with teachers. NCCA will promote the significant role of parents by providing training for parents and multiple avenues for communication. Regular feedback through surveys and the StarTrack system encourages summative and formative feedback of the learning process and program.

Parents will have multiple opportunities to shape the overall school experience. During the life of the school, they can volunteer to serve as Community Coordinators arranging field trips and other face-to-face activities among families who live nearby. In addition to facilitating field trips and outings, Community Coordinators will often develop group projects, typically with a charitable or community service goal for students to participate in face-to-face as well as virtually. Community Coordinators will have the support and encouragement from staff to coordinate local projects for their students. For optional in-person activities such as field trips, teachers will coordinate with parents to facilitate transportation through carpooling as much as possible.

Parents can also join Club Orange. This exciting club brings together parents of prospective students who reach out to their local communities to spread the word about NCCA.

We will survey parents annually to evaluate the school on a number of criteria including student progress, teacher support, and the quality of the curriculum. Parents will be surveyed to get their feedback on the program to help identify what the school is doing well and how it can improve.

Communication will also be important outside of Connexus for existing and prospective families and community members. Drawing on the combined

experience of Connections outreach and technology groups, NCCA will maintain a public website that contains all relevant and required information to ensure all stakeholders are informed about NCCA. The website will include enrollment and school information and also create opportunities for parent-to-parent communication through Contact-a-Parent. NCCA will develop a student information and community education plan to inform potential students, their parents/guardians, and other interested parties about the education program.

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 Governing Board members will be encouraged to seek officer positions. The volunteer-parent Community Coordinators will 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 the school staff will be attuned to parent and community needs and vice versa.

On a daily basis, NCCA parents will express their opinion 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. 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 will ensure that students are able to attend.*

As NCCA will be a virtual school, students 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 testing. For optional in-person activities such as field trips, teachers will coordinate with parents to facilitate transportation through carpooling as much as possible.

As a statewide virtual school, NCCA's obligation to provide transportation services will be limited to those students whose IEP and/or Section 504 plan require services to be provided that are typically provided outside the home. NCCA will utilize three options for providing students with access to these services.

1. NCCA will compensate service providers to provide services in the student's home whenever possible.
2. For parents who prefer students to receive services outside the home, or when a service provider is not available to provide services inside the home, NCCA will provide mileage reimbursement to parents who are available to transport the student.

3. In all other circumstances, NCCA will contract with one or more third-party transportation providers at no cost to the student or parent to transport the student to the service provider location.

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.*

Parent Grievance Resolution Process - These responsibilities will be set out in the Parent/Legal Caretaker Agreement (PLCA) and the school handbook and include: contacting families regularly, delivering educational materials and equipment, and providing accessible support. NCCA will also ensure the family and student adhere to their responsibilities as stated in the PLCA and the school handbook. If necessary, the school will discipline for violation of policy. If a parent has concerns, he/she may institute the grievance process outlined in the handbook.

1. A parent with a grievance must, in writing, report the dissatisfaction, and submit it to the student's teacher (or other appropriate NCCA staff member as necessary). All parties involved must be appropriately defined and the problem must be clearly outlined.

2. The recipient of the grievance (generally the teacher) must review the issue with his/her supervisor (generally the Principal) and respond to the parent within three school days.

3. If the original recipient did not resolve the grievance, the parent should request a meeting with the recipient's supervisor. The supervisor should investigate the matter, and schedule a meeting with the parent, the student, and if necessary, any other staff members, within five school days.

4. If either party does not resolve this grievance, the parent should then request a meeting with the school administration. School administration will investigate the matter and schedule a meeting within five school days.

5. If a resolution was not reached at the three meetings, the parent may request a meeting with the parent member of the Governing Board who will investigate the matter and arrange a meeting within five school days.

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

Under SBE 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 needed in order to ensure that the student will have access to the educational program. NCCA will provide school communication in native languages to the extent possible for parents who speak a language other than English.

## **Admissions Policy**

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

1. *Tentative dates for the open enrollment application period; enrollment deadlines and procedures. \*Please be advised schools cannot accept applications until after final approval from the SBE.*
2. *Clear policies and procedures detailing the open enrollment lottery plan including policies regarding statutory permitted student enrollment preferences.*

3. *Clear policies and procedures for student waiting lists, withdrawals, re-enrollment, and transfers.*
4. *Explanation of the purpose of any pre-admission activities (if any) for students or parents.*
5. *Clear policies and procedures for student withdraws and transfers.*
6. *Finite intent to enroll information -- how collected, when, and in what manner will this be tracked by school and reported to SBE.*

NCCA will be open to all students statewide and will not discriminate. Enrollment will open in March 2015 for the 2015-2016 school year and initial enrollment will remain open for 30 days. Families will be informed that the school is tuition free. NCCA will be non-secretarian in its programs, admission policies, employment practices, and all other operations. Admission to the school will not be determined according to the place of resident of any pupil, or his/her guardian within North Carolina.

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. If the school is oversubscribed at the end of 30 days, a computer-generated random number lottery will be conducted in public and all parents will be notified in advance.

The lottery will provide for a random selection process by which all applicants who have completed all enrollment tasks by specified, publicly announced deadlines will be given an equal chance of being admitted. NCCA will give preference to students who were enrolled in the prior school year (once enrolled, students will not be required to reapply) and siblings of students presently enrolled. Parents of students selected in the lottery will have 10 days to accept an offer of enrollment or forfeit the student's space to the next student on the list. If the school is not oversubscribed at the end of the enrollment period, 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.

NCCA will engage families early in the enrollment process to ensure that they understand the responsibilities of working in the online environment and that they have selected the right educational option.

Students may withdraw from NCCA at any time, provided that the Learning Coach provides either evidence of homeschool registration consistent with state requirements or the name and location of another public or private school that the student will attend.

The Board will adopt a policy regarding students who provide written intent to enroll in NCCA for a finite period of time as permitted by Session Law 2014-100, Section 8.35(c)(4). The Board will adopt a policy regarding students who fail to regularly participate in courses pursuant to Session Law 2014-100, Section 8.35(b)(3).

NCCA's withdrawal rate will be calculated as follows:

\* Numerator: The number of students withdrawing after the 20th day of student enrollment who did not provide intent for finite enrollment.

\* Denominator: The number of students enrolled after the 20th day of student enrollment who remained in the school through the end of the school year or

who graduated.

\* Students not included in the Numerator or Denominator: students no longer eligible to enroll in a North Carolina public school; students who provide intent for finite enrollment per Session Law 2014-100, Section 8.35(c)(4), students who were withdrawn due to lack of regular participation per Session Law 2014-100, Section 8.35(b)(3); students who were enrolled less than 20 days.

To track the number of students enrolling for a finite period of time, families will be asked the following during the online enrollment process:

"Families have many reasons for choosing virtual education for their student. As this is a new offering in North Carolina, we would like to ask you to provide the expected duration of your students enrollment for the 2015-2016 school year. Do you intend to attend NCCA for the entire school year? Yes/No

Your answer to this question will have no bearing on your enrollment in the school as NCCA does not discriminate. The answer will help us serve you better.

**PROJECTED ENROLLMENT 2016-17 through 2018-2020**

IDENTIFY LEA FROM WHICH STUDENTS WILL PROBABLY COME

- LEA #1 Wake County Schools
- LEA #2 Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools
- LEA #3 Guilford County Schools

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.

	2016-2017			2017-2018			2018-2019			2019-2020		
	LEA 920	LEA 600	LEA 410	LEA 920	LEA 600	LEA 410	LEA 920	LEA 600	LEA 410	LEA 920	LEA 600	LEA 410
	600	600	300	720	720	360	864	864	432	1037	1037	518
	1500			1800			2160			2592		

**V. OPERATIONS**

**Transportation 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.*

As NCCA will be an online, virtual school serving students throughout the state, it will not provide routine transportation. Students 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 testing which students will take at proctored locations. NCCA will provide transportation for required activities and state testing and when a student does not have transportation necessary to the proctored location.

NCCA will comply with Session Law 2014-100, Section 8.35(c), which states a virtual charter school must maintain at least one testing center within each of the eight SBE districts.

As a statewide virtual school, NCCA's obligation to provide transportation services will be limited to those students whose IEP and/or Section 504 plan require services to be provided that are typically provided outside the home. NCCA will utilize three options for providing students with access to these services.

1. NCCA will compensate service providers to provide services in the student's home whenever possible.
2. For parents who prefer students to receive services outside the home, or when a service provider is not available to provide services inside the home, NCCA will provide mileage reimbursement to parents who are available to transport the student.
3. In all other circumstances, NCCA will contract with one or more third party transportation providers at no cost to the student or parent to transport the student to the service provider location.

*If field trips or regional centers are utilized for synchronous education, how will the virtual charter assist students that do not have transportation?*

Through the use of Connexus and message boards, school leadership will coordinate carpooling and ride sharing opportunities. For optional in-person activities such as field trips, teachers will coordinate with parents to facilitate transportation through carpooling as much as possible. Transportation may be provided to students whose families have a financial or logistical need for support.

As mentioned in the response to the previous question, NCCA's obligation to provide transportation services will be limited to those students whose IEP and/or Section 504 plan require services to be provided that are typically provided outside the home. NCCA will utilize three options for providing students with access to these services.

1. NCCA will compensate service providers to provide services in the student's home whenever possible.
2. For parents who prefer students to receive services outside the home, or when a service provider is not available to provide services inside the home, NCCA will provide mileage reimbursement to parents who are available to transport the student.
3. In all other circumstances, NCCA will contract with one or more third party transportation providers at no cost to the student or parent to transport the student to the service provider location.

**Civil Liability and Insurance (GS 115C-238.29F(c)):**

The Charter School shall 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; and
7. Workers' compensation: as specified by Chapter 97 of the General Statutes.

Area of proposed coverage	Proposed amount of coverage	Cost (Quote)
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Comprehensive General Liability		\$2,000,000	\$1,583.00
Officers and Directors/Errors and Omissions		\$1,000,000	\$1,750.00
Property Insurance		\$100,000	\$331.00
Motor Vehicle Liability		\$1,000,000	\$28.00
Bonding Minimum/Maximum Amount	\$250,000	\$500,000	\$281.00
Other		\$1,000,000	\$784.00
Total Cost			\$4,757.00

\*The applicant must provide a quote from an insurance provider as part of this application (as Appendix P) to demonstrate the levels of insurance coverage and projected cost.

**Health and Safety Requirements:**

All public charter schools are required to follow the regulations regarding health and safety as stated in § 115C238.29F (a).

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 will be 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 will be assigned to roles. Access to the reports and all student data will be controlled by these roles. Only users in a location with the correct roles can meet the requirements to access the data.*

*All data that will be accessed via Connexus will be managed through a forced SSL for privacy and security purposes. Private data transmitted between systems for data reporting purposes will always be done with secure FTP or over a private VPN that provides encryption. To ensure that valuable data will be available when needed but protected from misuse, Connections utilizes disk-to-disk backups for fast restore. The disk backup is then saved to the 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 24/7/365 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 has an extensive Terms of Use policy that governs Connexus and its users for terms, conditions, and notices. The policy 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. These Terms of Use are updated periodically. The most current version will always be available from the login page of Connexus. Any changes will be effective as soon as they are posted in Connexus.*

*The Terms of Use document is applicable to all users and covers acceptance of terms, permitted use, proprietary rights, copyright infringement, trademarks, links, privacy, export control, warranty, and other disclaimers, a disclaimer of warranty, limitations of liability, release, indemnification, governing law, severability, integration, and termination of use. The full policy can be viewed at the following URL: <https://www.connexus.com/public/termsfuse.html>*

- 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. NCCA is committed to following and implementing health and safety requirements applicable to public charter schools. Students should be able to learn in a safe and comfortable environment. NCCA requires two courses focused on safety.*

- 1) *Internet Safety - This course provides information about practicing safe behaviors online.*
- 2) *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 will track staff completion of trainings to ensure all staff members have completed them in a timely manner.*

*Learning Coaches will be asked to communicate and collaborate with teachers and other school staff as the staff members work to fulfill their professional roles in supporting student safety and well-being. They will be 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.*

*Technical Support will assist families with installing programs that enable automatic blocking of adult, phishing, and identity theft sites via DNS filtering. Technical Support can assist families with modifying browser security settings that limit potential malicious activity and installing CyberSitter.*

We, the Board members at (Charter School Name) will develop a written safety plan and policies to be shared with staff, parents and students and be available upon inspection from the Department of Public Instruction and local Health Departments.

bsetser            10/08/2014

(Board Chair Signature)

(Date)

**Facility:**

What is your plan to obtain a building? Identify the steps that the board will take to acquire a facility and obtain the Certificate of Occupancy. If a facility has been identified please fill out the Facility Form (Appendix Q).

NCCA has not secured a location for the teaching/learning center (administrative office). However, information regarding 25 potential properties located in Raleigh/Cary and Durham that could potentially serve as the center has been provided in Appendix R. Upon award of the charter,

NCCA will secure a facility within the requirements of the charter.

NCCA has analyzed several locations, including potential shared/joint use facilities based upon criteria needed to run an effective virtual school. Since facilities will not be needed until the fall of 2015, it is premature to perform a detailed analysis of facilities, as available rental properties may be significantly different in several months. Virtual schools require minimal build out which can be accomplished in the time frame needed.

The leased permanent office space will serve as the teaching/learning center where administrative and teaching staff will work. It may also serve as a resource center for students. The initial physical facility for the teaching/learning center will need to be flexible for growth and future needs. The teaching/learning center will include at least one conference room with doors for use in the IEP conferences and other special education-related activities.

Criteria that will be used to analyze facilities will include the following:

- \* The teaching/learning center will have a central location with easy access from major roadways to allow students and staff from various areas to reach it easily.
- \* The teaching/learning center will have adequate space for teacher cubicles, a Principal's office, a conference room, and a break room.
- \* The teaching/learning center will have air conditioning, heat, fluorescent lights, male and female bathrooms that are handicap accessible, adequate space security, and other fire and safety equipment.
- \* The teaching/learning center will provide the necessary infrastructure to support the computer network and phone system.
- \* The school estimates approximately 6,000 square feet total to meet its minimum requirements, allowing for necessary common space, egress, and typical build out for layout and infrastructure.
- \* The teaching/learning center space will be in compliance with or capable of modification to bring into compliance with all local building, zoning, and health and safety requirements.
- \* The teaching/learning center will meet all federal, state, and local minimum Americans with Disabilities (ADA) standards.
- \* The teaching/learning center will have ample parking accommodations.
- \* The teaching/learning center will be available to move in within three to six months from the date of search.
- \* The teaching/learning center will be comprised of approximately 20% office space and 80% open area for cubicles.

NCCA will take necessary steps to obtain the Certificate of Occupancy for the teaching/learning center. Students will be present in the teaching/learning center only on the rare drop-in basis and will not gather there for instructional activities.

Please attach copies of Facilities Inspections as Appendix R.

Outline your plan to have a testing center in each of the SBE regions.

*NCCA will meet the requirements of the pilot program to provide a testing center in each of the eight*

*SBE regions. NCCA will seek to license or short term lease for the necessary time period, a testing facility or meeting center located in a hotel, conference center, or similar facility. Additionally, NCCA will contact each SBE region to see if there is a possibility of housing the testing or meeting center within school district facility space. This strategy will save the expense for a permanent long term leased space in each SBE region.*

*What is the breakdown of cost per square foot for the proposed facility? Outline how this cost is comparable to the commercial and educational spaces for the proposed school location.*

Based on information discovered during the initial surveys, rental rates for the teaching center will be between \$20-\$25 full-service gross per square foot, which includes base rent, utilities, common area maintenance and other operating expenses.

**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.*

While we expect no issues to impact the opening of the teaching/learning center before the school start date, the flexible teaching model allows teachers to educate students remotely, from the teaching/learning center, from multiple teaching/learning centers, or from a temporary location. This maximizes expansion and contraction potential and eliminates the need for excessive, under-utilized space. In the event of an unanticipated incident affecting the center, teachers will be able to effectively operate in a variety of locations and circumstances.

Our partner, Connections, has a robust facilities team with extensive experience fielding teaching/learning centers all around the country on short notice - sometimes as standing up leased spaces (start to finish) in less than three months. Further, they have worked through natural disasters impacting other centers to provide timely and adequate emergency temporary facilities while the primary facility was either rehabbed or relocated.

## VI. 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 school budget will rely on variable income.

### Budget: Revenue Projections from each LEA 2016-17

<p><b>SHOW CALCULATIONS FOR FIGURING STATE AND LOCAL DOLLARS FOR THE PROPOSED CHARTER SCHOOL</b></p> <p><i>Refer to the Resource Manual Finance Section for guidance on estimated funding amounts</i></p>	<p><b>State Funds:</b> Charter schools receive an equivalent amount per student as the local education agency (LEA) receives per student receives from the State. Funding is based on the 1<sup>st</sup> month average daily membership.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In year 1 – Base state allotments are determined by the LEA in which <u>the student</u> resides</li> <li>In year 2 and beyond- Base State allotments are determined by the LEA in which <u>the school</u> is located.</li> </ul> <p><b>Local Funds:</b> Charter schools receive a per pupil share of the local current expense of the LEA in which the student resides.</p> <p><b>Federal Funds:</b> Charter schools must qualify and apply for the individual federal grants based on their population of students.</p> <p><b>REFER TO RESOURCE GUIDE FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AND SOURCE DOCUMENTS</b></p>			
	<p>LEA #1 920 - Wake County Schools</p>			
	<b>Revenue</b>	<b>2014-2015 Per Pupil Funding</b>	<b>Projected LEA ADM</b>	<b>Approximate funding for 2016-2017</b>
	State Funds	\$4,501.95	600	\$2,701,170.00
	Local Funds	\$790.00	600	\$474,000.00
	Federal EC Funds	\$3,768.11	72	\$271,303.92
	<b>Totals</b>			\$3,446,473.92
	<p>LEA #2 600 - Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools</p>			
	<b>Revenue</b>	<b>2014-2015 Per Pupil Funding</b>	<b>Projected LEA ADM</b>	<b>Approximate funding for 2016-2017</b>
	State Funds	\$4,505.20	600	\$2,703,120.00
Local Funds	\$790.00	600	\$474,000.00	
Federal EC Funds	\$3,768.11	72	\$271,303.92	
<b>Totals</b>			\$3,448,423.92	
<p>LEA #3 410 - Guilford County Schools</p>				
<b>Revenue</b>	<b>2014-2015 Per Pupil Funding</b>	<b>Projected LEA ADM</b>	<b>Approximate funding for 2016-2017</b>	
State Funds	\$4,615.50	300	\$1,384,650.00	
Local Funds	\$790.00	300	\$237,000.00	
Federal EC Funds	\$3,574.51	36	\$128,682.36	
<b>Totals</b>			\$1,750,332.36	

**Total Budget: Revenue Projections 2016-17 through 2019-2020**

INCOME: REVENUE PROJECTIONS	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020

**\*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 documents, etc., on the commitment of these funds. If these figures are loans, the repayment needs to be explained in the narrative and found within the budget projections.**

**Assurances are needed to confirm the commitment of these additional sources of revenue. Please include these as Appendix S.**

**Personnel Budget: Expenditure Projections 2016-17 through 2019-2020**

*The personnel list below may be amended to meet the staffing of individual charter schools: This list should align with the projected staff located in the Operations Plan.*

BUDGET EXPENDITURE PROJECTIONS Personnel	2016-2017			2017-2018			2018-2019			2019-2020		
	<i>Num Staff</i>	<i>Avg Salary</i>	<i>Total salary</i>	<i>FTE</i>	<i>Avg Salary</i>	<i>Total salary</i>	<i>FTE</i>	<i>Avg Salary</i>	<i>Total salary</i>	<i>FTE</i>	<i>Avg Salary</i>	<i>Total salary</i>

**Operations Budget: Expenditure Projections 2016-17 through 2019-2020**

<b>BUDGET OPERATIONS EXPENDITURE PROJECTIONS</b>		<b>2016-2017</b>	<b>2017-2018</b>	<b>2018-2019</b>	<b>2019-2020</b>
	Disability	\$950	\$947	\$947	\$944
	Disability	\$756	\$203	\$202	\$201
	Health Insurance	\$8,218	\$8,187	\$8,187	\$8,168
	Health Insurance	\$6,542	\$6,503	\$6,475	\$6,445
	Life Insurance	\$257	\$256	\$256	\$255
	Life Insurance	\$204	\$752	\$749	\$745
	Medicare	\$745	\$742	\$742	\$740
	Medicare	\$593	\$589	\$587	\$584
	Retirement Plan--Other	\$513	\$512	\$512	\$511
	Retirement Plan--Other	\$409	\$407	\$404	\$403
	Social Security	\$3,185	\$3,173	\$3,173	\$3,165
	Social Security	\$2,535	\$2,520	\$2,509	\$2,498
	<b>Total Benefits</b>	<b>\$24,907</b>	<b>\$24,791</b>	<b>\$24,743</b>	<b>\$24,659</b>





*Provide an explanation as to why you believe there is a demand for the school that will meet this enrollment projection.*

*Provide the break-even point of student enrollment.*

The enrollment projections are conservative based upon the demand in North Carolina for full time virtual education and the experience of other similar statewide schools in other states. There is strong demand for the school throughout North Carolina. Over 5,500 families have expressed interest in learning more about the program. In addition, 48 information sessions were held throughout 2013 and 2014 in North Carolina communities. Meetings were held both in-person throughout the state and online. During each information session, parents, students, and community stakeholders were given an opportunity to ask questions about the proposed public charter school as well as learn more about the school's curriculum, courses, student support services, and student activity clubs.

To offer the level of service detailed in this application, the break-even point of student enrollment will be 1,178 students.

Additionally, the online application system only permitted the selection of three LEAs. Therefore, only three LEAs are used throughout this application for enrollment projections and budgeting requirements.

*Discuss the school's contingency plan to meet financial needs if anticipated revenues are not received or are lower than estimated.*

If financial circumstances warrant it, NCCA will implement a policy of hiring staff only as enrollment requires. NCCA will make wise financial decisions while ensuring students' academic needs are met.

NCCA has contracted for services on a per pupil basis from Connections, so as to make as many expenses of the school variable instead of fixed. This will ensure the majority of expenses can change with enrollment. If it is determined the school will not be able to meet its financial obligations to Connections as a result of decreased revenue, Connections will provide services credits (discounts on products and services) to protect NCCA against a deficit.

NCCA will build a reserve fund of a reasonable size if unobligated funding is available. This rainy day fund will be available when unexpected expenses are incurred or revenue shortfalls occur. The budget includes a surplus of \$287,809 in Year 1 and a cumulative reserve of \$1,274,787 in Year 4.

*Does the budget rely on sources of funds other than state, county, and federal (e.g. loans, donations etc.)? If so, please provide the source and amount. Be sure that the appropriate assurances documentation is provided in the appendices*

*The budget does not rely on sources of funds other than the state ADM funds, local per pupil funds, and exceptional children federal funds.*

*Provide the student to teacher ratio that the budget is built on.*

Ranges from 38.5:1 in Year 1 to 36.5:1 in Year 4

- 2. Does the school intend to contract for services such as student accounting and financial services, exceptional children instructional support, custodial etc. Describe the criteria and*

*procedures for the selection of contractors and large purchases.*

NCCA intends to contract with Rives and Associates (<http://rivescpa.com>) for auditing services. Our entire Governing Board met with Evan Rives to discuss services and the partnership, as indicated in Appendix V. Rives and Associates has a number of public school and charter school clients and is well-acquainted with the charter school landscape in North Carolina. Rives and Associates has offices in Raleigh, Charlotte, and Lexington.

In addition, NCCA has contracted with Connections for business, financial, and accounting services through the Educational Products & Services Agreement (Appendix L). Developing NCCA's annual budget will be an iterative process incorporating input from key stakeholders, including the Principal and designated members of the Governing Board. A preliminary budget based on initial assumptions will be presented to the Governing Board and will be approved by the Governing Board before the start of the school year. This budget will then be compared to the actual and forecasted results on a monthly basis. NCCA staff will receive training on the Uniform Education Reporting System (UERS) and the Integrated Software Information System (ISIS) software programs.

The Governing Board has also contracted with Connections for the benefit of a smooth school start up, quality academic materials for students, and national best practices expertise and guidance. Connections has a proven record of success collaborating with public virtual schools and consistent strong ratings from parents. Schools supported by Connections have proven acceptance of students in to highly regarding colleges and universities, strong independent governing boards who make decisions about the school, and passionate testimonials from families about their successful experiences. Connections will be a critical partner in achieving the school's mission, with strong oversight by the Governing Board, to empower children with knowledge, skills, and character traits to be successful in their education through an engaging, personalized learning experience a full-time virtual school.

The Governing Board has also contracted with Connections for exceptional children instructional support due to their experience and positive track record working with and supporting students with disabilities.

*3. Explain how the budget aligns with the school's mission, curricular offerings, transportation plans, and facility needs.*

The Governing Board will budget responsibly, investing in teachers, technology, and instructional materials that improve student learning. In order to achieve its mission, the school must remain fiscally sound. NCCA provides a full-time school experience which includes more than just courses. Each student will have a progression plan focused on career and college readiness. Beginning in grade 9, guidance counselors work with each student individually on graduation plans with a focus on appropriate courses, credits, and post-secondary planning. Students at all grade levels participate in clubs, activities, and electives to complete the full-school experience.

NCCA will reach students who need a flexible schedule and for whom a cutting-edge virtual approach provides the best pathway to successful

completion of their education program. NCCA will promote academic and emotional success for every learner through a personalized learning program combining the best in virtual education with real and engaging connections among students, family, teachers, and the community. The NCCA approach will provide students with the opportunity for enrollment in a public school outside of the traditional classroom on a full-time basis. NCCA is not a course program; it is a whole-school experience for its students with academic, behavioral, emotional, and career support.

4. *What percentage of expenditures will be the school's goal for a general fund balance?*

*Describe how the school will develop the fund balance.*

The Governing Board has developed a plan that will increase the school's general fund balance as enrollment grows. As the school expands, economies of scale will be achieved, NCCA's contingency reserve will increase and the Governing Board will have the available resources to meet future obligations of the school. The Governing Board has set a goal to establish a general fund balance of 7% of total operating expenses by its fifth year of operations, subject to availability of funds.

The Governing Board will monitor the school's financial position to ensure that available funds are appropriately designated in a manner that will ensure the school's continuing financial viability. Additionally, the Governing Board has negotiated an agreement with Connections that will allow the school to reimburse Connections only as funding becomes available. Connections will also provide service credits (discounts on products and services) to protect NCCA against a deficit.

This unique arrangement will allow the Governing Board to allocate additional funds towards academic achievement while maintaining a reserve that will help ensure the ongoing success of the school.

5. *Provide a description of proposed financing structure. Include financing of facilities, other asset financing and leases.*

The Governing Board does not intend to secure any long-term debt to finance the purchase of a school facility. The school's virtual education model requires only leased office space as the teaching/learning center for both the teachers and administrators to conduct school operations. In addition, NCCA will seek to license or short term lease for the necessary time period, a testing facility or meeting center located in a hotel, conference center, or similar facility, in each of the eight SBE regions (as required by the terms of the pilot). This significantly reduces financial risks associated with large debt obligations that are often assumed by traditional schools.

The Governing Board has contracted with Connections for use of various equipment needed by the school. As part of the arrangement, the school has the option to pay for the use of technology devices (including repairs, software installation, etc.) without bearing the risks associated with purchasing and managing such equipment. Exercising this option will allow NCCA to incur technology costs only when they are absolutely needed rather than purchasing technology to meet the anticipated needs of teachers and staff. Leases for other office equipment (copies, postage machines, etc.) will be managed by Connections and reimbursed by NCCA, at cost, when funds are available to the school.

6. *Will the school have assets from other sources (e.g. building, furniture, chairs, computers, etc.)? If yes, please provide a list. Note which are secured and which are anticipated, and include evidence of commitment for any assets on which the school's core operation depends.*

NCCA will need furniture and equipment to outfit the leased facility that will be used by both teachers and administrators. The Governing Body does not intend to purchase a building (as described previously) and has no outstanding commitments for any of the anticipated fixed asset purchases at this time.

**Financial Compliance:** (No more than a half of a page)

*How will the school ensure adequate internal controls, including segregation of duties, safeguarding of assets, accurate and adequate recording keeping?*

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 reporting.

NCCA has contracted with Connections for business, financial, and accounting services. Connections will report directly to the Governing Board working alongside the Principal. Developing NCCA's annual budget will be an iterative process incorporating input from key stakeholders, including the Principal and designated members of the Governing Board. A preliminary budget based on initial assumptions will be presented to the Governing Board and will be approved by the Governing Board before the start of the school year. 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. NCCA will also establish policies and procedures and will institute rigorous financial controls including the following.

- \* 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 a designee of the Governing Board. Connections will review the proposed expenditure for approval and to determine whether it is consistent with the Governing Board's adopted budget. Supporting documentation will be required for all expenditures.

- \* To ensure fiscal responsibility and compliance, the Governing Board will meet regularly to review the operations and financial performance of the school.

- \* 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. Access to these accounts will be limited to individuals designated by the Governing Board.

- \* Each month, NCCA will produce a set of detailed financial statements that include a statement of activities, 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 Treasurer of the Governing Board will be provided with access to such financial documents for review as an increased measure of oversight and governance.

Once NCCA's charter is approved, the Governing Board will enter into a contract with Rives and Associates to conduct an audit. The annual audit will be completed and files with the Local Government Commission (LGC) and DPI by October 31, beginning with October 31 after the first year of operations. The audit will be conducted in accordance with the Government Accounting Standards and will meet the specific compliance requirements set forth by North Carolina.

*Provide any known or possible related party transactions (relationship, description of transaction and estimated dollars involved)*

None known.

*Provide the name and contact information of the independent audit firm who will conduct the annual financial statement audit. If a firm has yet to be identified please list the firms the board has investigated.*

Rives and Associates, 702 Oberlin Road, Suite 410, Raleigh, NC 27605, phone (919) 832-6848, fax (919) 832-7288.

**VII AGREEMENT PAGE**

**Application Fee:**

*Pursuant to § 115C-238.29B(e) the charter school applicant must submit a \$1000 application fee to the Office of Charter Schools. The applicant must submit their application fee by the September 26, 2014 5:00 pm EDT deadline. Payments will be accepted in the form of a check or credit card. The Credit card Form is found on the Office of Charter Schools website. Cash is not accepted.*

*\*Application Note: The applicant must mail the check or credit card form along with a letter indicating the name of the proposed charter school, contact information and the enclosed payment amount to be received before or on the due date of September 26, 2014 5:00 pm EDT. Failure to submit payment by the stipulated timeline to the Office of Charter Schools will deem the application incomplete.*

*Payments should be made payable to North Carolina Department of Public Instruction*

*North Carolina Department of Public Instruction  
Office Of Charter Schools  
6303 Mail Service Center  
Raleigh, NC 27699-6303*

*I understand the requirements pursuant to G.S. 115C-238.29B(e).*

Date:

**Applicant Signature:**

The foregoing application is submitted on behalf of North Carolina Connections Academy (*name of non-profit corporation or individuals submitting application*). The undersigned has read the application and hereby declares that the information contained 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.

Print/Type Name: bsetser

Board Position: Bryan Setser, Governing Board President

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: 10/08/2014

Sworn to and subscribed before me this  
\_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 20\_\_\_\_.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Notary Public

\_\_\_\_\_  
Official Seal

My commission expires: \_\_\_\_\_, 20\_\_\_\_.



