

# *New Century Charter School*

## Charter School Proposal

Respectfully submitted to the  
Minnesota State Charter School Advisory committee  
January 28, 2002

## Introduction

The following proposal to create New Century Charter School in Hutchinson, Minnesota is the dream of educators, parents and business leaders. For the past six months we have been meeting to forge a unique quality educational option for students in and around the Hutchinson area. We have held strategic planning sessions, public information meetings and negotiations with a wide range of constituent groups. Parents and community members have been interested and intrigued by the potential option being made available.

We intend to create an innovative and high quality secondary school for students of all abilities and interests. The innovation will be characterized by a project-based, individualized and experiential program managed by educators, who will organize themselves in a teacher-owner cooperative, enhancing accountability and professionalism. Parents and the community will play a key role in the school's academic and outreach success.

Bolstered by growing support and the need to offer true school choice, the New Century Charter School planning committee is ready to move forward and offers the following plan. We want to acknowledge everyone's generous assistance in helping move this effort along. The planning committee members are: *Steve Auger, Dave Conrad, Tom Daggett, Jim Fahey, Julie Finner, Dede Hard, Dolf Moon, Dave Radloff, Sherrie Ristau, John Rodeberg, and Gina Smith.*

### I. Purpose

A. The purposes for creating New Century Charter School are as follows.

1. Improve student learning
2. Increase learning opportunities for students
3. Encourage the use of different and innovative teaching methods
4. Require the measurement of learning outcomes and create different and innovative forms of measuring outcomes
5. Establish new forms of accountability for schools
6. Create new professional opportunities for teachers including the opportunity to be responsible for the learning program at the school site

Here is how we will accomplish our purposes.

### 1. Improve Student Learning

At New Century Charter School student learning will increase because cognitive skill development and doing a few things well are considered more important than covering a host of topics. Students will be expected to use their minds well, master a number of essential skills and areas of knowledge, individualize and personalize their goals, and motivate their own learning situations. Students' engagement, retention and transfer of knowledge increase because of students' involvement in self-directed, project-based learning. All projects will be built around students' interests and the MN graduation standards.

Project-based learning in an advisor system allows for students to build a relationship with an adult over more than one year. Together with advisors, students will work together to discuss, plan and carry out a task or set of tasks. Project design demands that students learn to find and make effective use of resources. The self-evaluation component of each project will increase students' learning, as students are involved in the process of determining quality indicators. Students will gain responsibility for determining what needs improvement, how to make the improvements, and then to follow through with the changes.

Core classes will be required in the areas of science, math, social studies and English. These classes will take up approximately one half of a student's school day. Core classes are closely related to the project learning part of the school day. Core classes will increase student learning by serving three main purposes. Classes will provide opportunities for structured learning activities to teach concepts needed as prior knowledge before beginning a proposed project. Classes are a springboard for project ideas which students can personalize and carry out. Classes will also provide time with other students and the educator expert for group problem solving of issues that are raised during individual and group projects.

### 2. Increase Learning Opportunities for Students

Students' learning opportunities will not have preset limits. Time and resources spent on a project will be guided by students' focus and creativity, as well as standards. Life and community application will be encouraged and in some cases, required. Students must be able to justify the expansion or continuation of a project. Timelines will be closely monitored.

Within the school structure, the development of social skills will be facilitated through advisory groups and project groups. Students with diverse personal attributes will have the opportunity to deepen their relationships with each other. Students will learn tolerance and appreciation for the uniqueness of their classmates.

In many ways New Century Charter School is a school without walls. Opportunities to expand learning by bringing the world into the school will include the regular use of technology as a learning tool, community experts and parents' involvement in project approval, and students' expectation to take part in community presentation nights. Opportunities to expand learning by moving beyond the school campus include field trips, internships, community service and using technology for wider project audience.

### 3. Encourage the Use of Different and Innovative Teaching Methods

Creativity and innovation will be encouraged and necessary in a project-based setting. Advisors must expose students to new project ideas and must be prepared to guide students towards their interests. There will be an on going consciousness about relationships across disciplinary lines and the boundaries of the school itself. Flexible scheduling and a low student teacher ratio will make it possible to follow through with creative teaching ideas. This is especially true because advisor/advisee groups stay together longer than one year.

Staff selection invites educators with a proven record of successful, innovative teaching to join New Century Charter School. The emphasis put on staff training and continued education will show that teacher growth is expected and rewarded.

The possibility of a relationship with EdVisions Cooperative will allow for an enhanced professional development focus and staff development emphasis.

### 4. Require the Measurement of Learning Outcomes and Create Different and Innovative Forms of Measuring Outcomes

New Century Charter School's clearly stated outcomes will meet or exceed the content areas and levels of learning outlined by the MN Graduation Standards and Profiles of Learning. Expected outcomes and standards will be communicated to teachers, students, parents and the community. Students will be required to incorporate MN Graduation Standards into all projects. They will determine which standards are most applicable to each given project and decide what means will be used to achieve the standards. All projects will be assessed using performance standards that give quality criteria for the outcomes that are being measured. Part of the project approval process is the students' involvement in determining the criteria of quality. Students self-evaluate their progress towards the performance standards. People outside of the school will be utilized to help judge student work. Students' thinking process and management of the tasks will also be assessed for each project. Students' progress will be reported to families and is included on their transcripts.

After being fully supported in the completion of their project, students are required to participate in presentation nights. This opportunity to share their learning with peers, educators, parents and community members will allow everyone to see what the students

have learned. In addition, the presentation is another excellent learning experience for the students.

As part of their classroom assignments, students complete tests, classroom activities and discussions, and assigned projects. Some of these will be for the purpose of measuring student learning. Students' classroom learning will be reported to families and be included on student transcripts.

#### 5. Establish New Forms of Accountability for Schools

New Century Charter School will be held accountable to a number of stakeholders, including the students, the parents, the community, our sponsor and the State of Minnesota. We will use multiple measures to assure that our school provides a high quality education for our students. Some of those measures include:

- a. standardized tests measuring student growth in at least two academic areas
- b. performance on projects and standards, as measured by project rubrics, life skills rubrics and presentation skills
- c. attitudinal and satisfaction surveys of students, parents and staff
- d. explanations of how staff have used the above to build in professional development and staff improvement (i.e. learning community)

#### 6. Create New Professional Opportunities for Teachers

All students and all staff will be given support to achieve professional integrity in their respective roles, and at their respective levels of mental, emotional and physical development. Entrepreneurial opportunities are open to students for the benefit of the school, and to staff for the benefit of educational excellence. Teachers at New Century Charter School will be organized in a teacher cooperative modeled after the EdVisions Cooperative. The cooperative model will give staff shared authority over the development and the implementation of the learning program with the acceptance of responsibility for the learning of the students. Teachers will be involved in the selection, professional development and evaluation of teachers in the school. In addition, the teachers will have responsibility for management and administrative decisions for the school. The model will create an opportunity to fundamentally alter the professional relationships in the school. New Century Charter School has received assurances of technical support for the creation of the cooperative model from the EdVisions Cooperative.

#### B. Student Achievement

Student achievement will be improved by empowering students to assume the privilege and responsibility for developing their own project-based curriculum within the guidelines of content and performance standards. Students receive the support needed to

identify and define an area of investigation, to develop and implement a successful plan of action, and to evaluate their completed work.

## II. Governance

### A. Interim Board of Directors

Until the first official board is elected, select founders will act as an interim board. The Interim Board consists of the following members:

- Dave Conrad, *Charter School Developer.*
- Dede Hard, *Charter School Developer.*
- David Radloff, *Charter School Developer.*
- Sherry Ristau, *Charter School Developer.*
- Gina Smith, *Charter School Developer.*

### B. Permanent Board of Directors

New Century Charter School will call an election of the Board of Directors at the first Annual Meeting during the first year of operation. The board will have between five and seven members. The majority of the board will be licensed teachers on staff at New Century Charter School. Other members can be parents, students, community members or members of the Hutchinson Chamber.

### C. Administration and Management Responsibilities

The Board of Directors is expected to uphold the mission and the vision of the founding members, and will be responsible for the overall policy and direction of the school. The board will be responsible for making sure all legal responsibilities are fulfilled.

**School Leadership** – The Board of Directors develops overall policy and long-range plans. School leadership will be a cooperative effort of all faculty and staff. New Century Charter School advisors will serve on committees in addition to their regular teaching and advising duties. Committees will be empowered to make decisions in their area of specialty, except those requiring approval by the Board of Directors. A lead teacher will be employed to ensure that the decisions of the cooperative are being carried out and to provide accountability.

**Curriculum** – The entire staff is responsible for implementing our project-based educational model. This includes setting the content and performance standards which include the MN Graduation Standards. The teachers will also design the rubrics that are consistent across projects (rubrics for various purposes of writing, speaking and reading,

and rubrics for students thinking and work habits through out the project). Teachers will also design the curriculum for the core classes.

**Staffing** – The Personnel Board (a committee of the staff site-based team) will make recommendations for all staffing decisions. This includes hiring, firing and salaries. The Personnel Board will conduct annual performance reviews for all staff. Parents and students have opportunity to give input on staff performance. The personnel board considers this feedback along with peer and self-evaluation. The Board of Directors will have responsibility for approving all recommendation by the Personnel Board. The Board of Directors is responsible for hiring start-up staff.

**Special Education** – We intend to consider a combination of direct hires and contract services to meet the need of identified special education students.

**Business and Finance** – Budget decisions will be the responsibility of the staff site-based team as overseen by the Board of Directors.

**Day-to Day Operation** – The day-to-day operation of the school will be handled cooperatively by all faculty and staff. For accountability purposes, the Lead Teacher will have ultimate responsibility for the day-to-day operation of the school.

**Reporting** – The staff site-based team must report on student progress and school progress towards academic and non-academic goals. They report to families and the Board of Directors. The Board of Directors report to the community and the sponsoring agency.

D. All services that New Century Charter School is legally mandated to provide, but is unable to provide will be contracted through appropriate service providers.

#### E. Admission Policies

New Century Charter School’s admission policies and procedures will comply with Minnesota Statutes for regulation of admission to charter schools. Admission will not be limited on the basis of intellectual ability, measures of achievement or aptitude, or athletic ability. Any eligible pupil who submits a timely application will be admitted unless the number of applications exceeds the capacity of the grade level or school. If necessary, students will be accepted by lot. Preference will be given to siblings of currently enrolled students.

During the first year New Century Charter School will enroll students in grades seven through ten. In the second year of operation students in grade 11 may enroll; and students in grade 12 may enroll in the third year. The school enrollment will not exceed 120 students unless determined by the Board of Directors before a lottery is held. Admission may be limited by grade level.

Deadline for application will be March 1 prior to the start of the school year. If the maximum enrollment has been filled a lottery will be held. All students will be drawn in the lottery and either enrolled in the school or placed on the waiting list. Families who submit applications after the application deadline will be placed on the waiting list according to the date of their application. Families on the waiting list must resubmit their application the following year to be considered for admission.

Students attending New Century Charter School may automatically enroll for the following year.

### **III. Learning Program**

#### **A. Curriculum**

1. The curriculum is based on a cooperatively created set of projects derived from an area or issue of interest. The curriculum, projects and core classes are woven together and accumulate to demonstrate knowledge and skills that are aligned with the MN Graduation Standards. We view project-based learning as students, in groups and individually, choosing, planning, researching and completing academic study and hands-on projects that result in tangible products. The process is coached by staff to engage students in studies that follow their interest areas, are closely related to experiences they will be involved in when they complete formal schooling, include community experts as much as possible, and cover broad academic areas of study. Student work over four years must fulfill the MN Profile of Learning Standards for graduation. Students consult with their advisors at least three times per week. Students create their own projects with assistance from parents and advisors. Students must present a minimum of three of their projects per year at a public presentation. Seniors are required to be part of a public exhibition of an interdisciplinary project they have completed.
2. The school will document that students are demonstrating successful progress at meeting or exceeding the MN Graduation Standards in accordance to the Commissioner's guidelines. Documentation will appear in the annual report completed and provided to the sponsor by September 15<sup>th</sup> of the year following the academic year. There is not a predetermined schedule of what MN Graduation Standards will be met during which year. Each student has an individual learning plan which is a combination of future learning goals and a record of past learning activities and assessments.
3. All of the MN Graduation High Standards learning areas and content standards will be offered. New Century Charter School will provide a manual describing the policies and procedures governing implementation of the MN Graduation Standards.

## B. Educational Delivery

New Century will work from a learner centered, constructivist model of instruction. We will base instructional design on individual students by supporting learning in ways that are consistent with both the research on learning and/or the learners' personal learning style. Students will identify and understand their own learning style in order to best design the individual learning plan.

The innovative teaching methods will focus on teaching the learner and facilitating learning rather than on teaching curriculum and controlling learning. Flexible paced learning will allow students to move to different levels according to academic progress rather than chronological age. The flexible approach calls of multiple formats, mixed age grouping, focused grouping, individual grouping and small class grouping. Continuous advisor relationships over a period of several years promotes in depth understanding and awareness of specific styles, needs and issues which may impact a learner academically, socially and emotionally.

Individualized, project-based learning is the cornerstone of the curriculum and provides the basis for instruction, research and individual skill development. Student reflection will be stressed and viewed as integral at all levels.

Learning is based on a combination of hands-on experiences, demonstrated academic outcomes and validated achievement of clear and measurable standards. Learning is assessed by the use of exhibited projects, locally assessed presentations, and standardized evaluations. Each student has a personal learning plan which becomes a combination of a post high school plan, a portfolio of learning learning activities and assessments, a resume of accomplishments and experiences, and community, teacher, student, and parent/guardian validated educational testimony.

Advisors meet daily with students to ensure that students can demonstrate continual growth related to the Life Performance rubric, as evaluated at the parent/guardian/student/staff conference. Students will set goals and improve areas of need. Advisors monitor students for continual improvement in the area of math and reading.

The school will provide instruction each year for at least the number of days specified in its proposal. It may provide instruction throughout the year according to Minnesota Statutes (Section 124D.12 to 124D.128).

## C. Special Education

Special Education will be provided through direct or contracted services according to all State and Federal requirements. The design of the school's instructional program mandates an Individual Learning Plan (ILP) for each student. The personalized nature of an ILP is similar to an Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) that any identified special

education student must have. Special education students will work from the mandated IEP which will reflect many of the aspects of the standard ILP, in addition to whatever specially designed instruction is required. New Century will have an inclusive approach to all students' development. Students and staff will be encouraged to respect and appreciate each other's differences.

#### IV. Accountability

- A. New Century Charter School will focus on two academic and two non-academic areas during the first year of operation. The academic outcomes will be in the areas of reading (language) and math. The two non-academic outcomes will *personal/social adjustment* and *family/community involvement*. All will be measured in the fall and the spring. The sponsor will also be given data showing faithfulness to terms of our contract. This will include being fiscally responsible as shown by the budgeting process, meeting state guidelines and providing communication to the community and sponsor.
- B. A nationally norm referenced test to be determined will be used to measure reading (language) and math in the fall and in the spring. Students are expected to show an average growth of one year's gain in their norm-referenced test scores. The MN Basic Skills tests from the Profiles of Learning will also be used. Achievement in the content areas of the Profiles of Learning will also be assessed throughout the year using project and performance based assessments. A rigorous Senior Exit Exhibit will also be assessed in future years.
- C. The two non-academic goals that New Century Charter School will measure are *personal/social adjustment* and *family/community involvement*. *Personal/Social adjustment* will be measured by using the following (but not limited to): Minnesota Student Survey, Brigance Diagnostic Inventories, staff observation and student survey (local design). Outcomes will be approved by the Board of Directors and shared with the sponsor and parents.

*Family and community involvement* will be measured in the following ways: Attendance at conferences and presentation nights will be monitored and recorded. A family survey will be conducted in the fall to gather baseline data about families' usual school involvement. After offering and requiring opportunities to be active in the students learning, a follow-up questionnaire will be given out in the spring. Community experts will be invited to participate as members of project approval group, assist with assessment and work with students in an intern arrangement. The growth of these community connections will be recorded. We will also measure student, staff and community satisfaction with these programs.

- D. New Century Charter School agrees to be held accountable for these outcomes and agrees that these outcomes will provide the basis for the school's annual report.

## V. Staff

- A. The staff will be comprised of teachers (one taking the role of director), paraprofessionals and other staff as appropriate for serving the mission of the school. For the first year of operation this will include 5 licensed teachers, including a special education teacher. Three paraprofessionals will be hired to work directly with students and help with the day-to-day running of the school. The staff will increase with the growth of student enrollment and the addition of grade 11 and 12. Teachers will be hired to maintain a student to teacher ratio of no greater than 1 to 17 and most likely 1 to 15. Community experts will enhance the learning opportunities when they are hired for short term contracts or act as volunteers on project approval group, assist with assessment or work with students in an intern arrangement.

The staff of New Century Charter School will be entrepreneurs who understand that their duties will stretch far beyond that of a teacher in a traditional school. Each teacher/advisor will be responsible for managing the learning experiences for a group of approximately 15 students/advisees. In addition teachers will have administrative duties, help with the day-to-day running of the school, and some will serve on the school's Board of Directors.

- B. New Century Charter School assures that teachers will be licensed as appropriate for their position. New Century Charter School anticipates helping teachers obtain a waiver for teaching across all academic areas in an Innovative Program. In addition, community experts may be utilized when beneficial to the mission and program of the school. New Century Charter School assures that all of the above will be in compliance with Minnesota teaching requirements.
- C. New Century Charter School will track licensure as applicable for licensed staff. New Century Charter School will require each teacher to provide a current copy of the state teaching license when they submit application for employment. Verification of each license will be made using the online licensure database established by the CFL. In addition staff will be reported to the CFL as required using the Staff Automated Reporting System (STAR). Also, a separate file folder will be maintained for each teacher and a procedure for meeting continuing education requirements will be established and followed.
- D. Staff licensure will be tracked through the Independent School District #423 Relicensure Committee. The committee meets four times annually.
- E. New Century Charter School will conduct required criminal background checks and maintain records of these checks.

## **VI. Sponsor Responsibilities**

- A. The length of the contract shall be for a period of three years. At that time the contract may be renewed with the agreement of both parties.
- B. The New Century Charter School Board of Directors will report twice annually to the sponsor to allow for ongoing monitoring of student and school outcomes identified in section IV of this outline.
- C. New Century Charter School will work with Dr. Walter Enloe, Associate Professor at Hamline University's Graduate School of Education to develop a model to evaluate the effectiveness of the entire school program.

## **VII. Transportation**

- A. Transportation will be provided by ISD 423 for a pupil residing in the same district. New Century Charter School may enter into separate contracts for services for extracurricular events, field trips and other activities.
- B. Written notice of transportation intentions will be provided to District 423 and CFL by July 1 before each school year.

## **VIII. Business Requirements**

### Statements of Assurances:

- A. New Century Charter School assures that it will purchase all required tort liability insurance and other insurance as required by law.
- B. New Century Charter School acknowledges that it must be organized as a non-profit corporation under statute 317A and will continue with such action when sponsorship is granted in the time frame required by law under section 501 (c)3.
- C. New Century Charter School is currently pursuing the lease and renovation of buildings at the Hutchinson Fair Grounds. This lease will be with the fair board, or with the county if the fair board gives over control to the county. This is a favorable arrangement for the charter school and the community. New Century Charter School acknowledges their responsibility in ensuring that the selected site meets all applicable codes as determined by the fire marshal and building inspector as determined by site use. New Century Charter School will meet all local health and safety codes.
- D. New Century Charter School agrees that the school will be non-sectarian with regard to program, admission, employment, etc.

- E. New Century Charter School agrees that it will not charge tuition.
- F. New Century Charter School agrees that it will comply with Title IX requirements for equal opportunity for students in athletics, in the event that it develops and offers an athletic program.

**IX. Finance**

- A. New Century Charter School will follow the State of Minnesota's Uniform Financial Accounting and Reporting Standards as applicable to charter schools in Statute section 124D.10.
- B. See Attachment for the projected four-year budget.