New Humble Community School Association

Calmar, Alberta

Charter School Evaluation Report

Evaluation conducted March 2024

Presented to the charter board May 2024

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I. INTRODUCTION

Background

The New Humble Community School Association (NHCSA) originated from the closure of the New Humble Centre School in 2020 by the Black Gold School Division. Previously established in 1900 and located in Leduc County, Alberta (approximately 35 minutes southwest of Edmonton), the New Humble Centre School served the community for over a century.

Following this closure, NHCSA was formed and applied for a charter to operate a new school. This new charter school opened in September 2021.

Building upon the foundation of community education, NHCSA offers a curriculum that integrates agriculture, environment, and stewardship that emphasizes hands-on learning experiences.

Enrolment per instructional group as of April 2024 was as follows:

School year	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total
2021-2022	19	17	8	17	10	8	10	89
2022-2023	18	22	22	7	22	11	13	115
2023-2024	21	21	22	23	7	22	12	128

Facilities

NHCSA occupies the historic building of the former New Humble Centre School, making it the oldest continually operating school in its original location in Alberta. The school shares the space with Humble Beginnings Playschool, which provides a natural transition for young children entering kindergarten in NHCSA.

NHCSA currently leases the space and grounds from the Black Gold School Division (BGSD).

NHCSA makes the most of its available space. The 5.75-acre grounds offer ample room for outdoor learning experiences. Recent additions include playground equipment, recreation structures, sports fields, and a skating rink. Beyond dedicated play areas, open fields provide flexible learning environments; a large barn, animal shelters, a garden, and the Humble Hands Legacy Gazebo contribute to NHCSA’s unique educational approach. These spaces allow for hands-on, experiential learning that aligns with the school’s charter goals and fosters engagement among students. NHCSA is expanding its learning opportunities by collaborating with local landowners to establish crop test plots and explore educational field trips.

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Staff

As reported by NHCSA, they employ 18 staff (with a total Full Time Equivalent or F.T.E of 17.4). Current F.T.E. as of March 21, 2024 (provided by NHCSA) is:

- Superintendent 0.6 F.T.E.
- Secretary-Treasurer 0.8 F.T.E.
- Teaching Staff of 8.0 F.T.E.
- Educational Assistants 6.0 F.T.E.
- School Secretary 1.0 F.T.E.
- Custodian 1.0 F.T.E.

Not included in the totals above, the school has an Administrative Secretary (1.0 F.T.E.) starting in April 2024, for a one-year appointment.

Foundational Statements

The essential elements of education as articulated in the NHCSA charter are:

Our Vision

NHCSA students will use the lens of agriculture, stewardship, and experiential learning to develop the skills, resilience, and values to be accountable and contributing citizens of local and global communities.

Our Purpose

Fostering the growth of each individual student through innovative academics, stewardship, and agricultural literacy.

Our Mission

To provide our students with a unique educational environment that:

- *expands learning through innovative agricultural and experiential land management education;*
- *fosters a joy of learning and instills curiosity and confidence;*
- *fully supports and engages their needs, abilities, and growth;*
- *develops opportunities for genuine collaboration and self-reflection; and*
- *is guided by compassionate, hands-on, creative educators who will represent and impart these skills and values in all students.*

Guiding Principles

New Humble Community School Association believes:

- *students can use the lens of agriculture, stewardship, and experiential learning to make meaningful connections that lead to success in education and in all areas of life;*
- *all students can maximize their diverse abilities and gifts through this comprehensive and specialized approach;*
- *teachers with an understanding of agricultural literacy are informed about the complexity and interconnectedness of learning and teaching;*

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- *teachers will develop and encourage respect, empathy, reciprocity, and cooperation;*
- *parents, guardians, and community members are integral partners in children's education, and all have a role to play in this unique and vibrant school;*
- *school administration should monitor and implement the growing weight of evidence about the positive impact of learning outdoors; and*
- *students will develop the skills, resilience, and values to ensure that they grow to be accountable and contributing citizens of local and global communities.*

Charter Goals and Outcomes

<u>Charter Goal 1: students will recognize and understand the foundational knowledge of agricultural literacy</u>

- Improved Student Learning Outcomes:
  - Students enrolled at NHCSA will develop the foundational knowledge of agricultural literacy and carry this with them throughout their academic careers. Outdoor, experiential, and hands-on learning are the primary vessels toward establishing and furthering the concept of agricultural literacy within our students. Developing grade appropriate, key insight into the intersectionality of the elements of agricultural literacy progressing in more complex and deeper understanding as the student advances through the program.
  - Students will develop grade appropriate comprehension and application skills relevant to the foundations of agricultural literacy.
  - Students demonstrate knowledge of intersectionality of the food and fiber system.
  - Students demonstrate confidence when engaging with peers, industry experts, and community members on topics related to agricultural literacy and environmental stewardship.
- Additional Outcomes:
  - Teachers will prioritize experiential learning and engage in outdoor learning, understanding the importance and great impact both of these have upon furthering student recognition, understanding, and achievement of agricultural literacy,
  - Parents will indicate a high level of satisfaction with programming offered at NHCSA.

<u>Charter Goal 2: students will demonstrate problem solving through adaptability, resilience, and critical thinking</u>

- Improved Student Learning Outcomes:
  - Students will develop a unique appreciation and understanding of how education applies to a multitude of environments. Intrinsic to NHCSA's philosophy, unique and innovative learning environments beyond the confines of the traditional four walls of a classroom will provide students with a wealth of opportunity to engage in active problem solving that are inherent in real-life situations.

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- Students will develop individual capacity to make appropriate cognitive, behavioral, and/or affective adjustments in the face of uncertainty and novelty.
- Students will demonstrate individual and collaborative problem solving skills.
- Students will demonstrate respect for individual perspectives and thus foster an appreciation for collaboration.
- Additional Outcome:
  - Parents will indicate a high level of satisfaction with the learning outcomes their child demonstrates at NHCSA.

Charter Goal 3: students will understand the value of goals and outcomes

- Improved Student Learning Outcomes:
  - Students enrolled at NHCSA will develop key insight into the importance of goals and outcomes. They will be encouraged to consider beyond their personal vested interests and explore what is most valuable to their class, school, community, province, and world. Fostering global citizenship is key to promoting successful members of future society.
  - Students will participate in integrated systems that support well rounded, holistic learning and education across academic, social, emotional, and physical components to further understanding and conceptualization of goals and outcomes.
  - Students demonstrate developmentally appropriate skills and behaviours related to goals and outcomes. Students will engage in individual and group activities (within their cohort class and multigrade cohorts) to encourage discussion and develop an understanding of the value of perspectives with goals and outcomes.
  - Students will demonstrate willingness to engage in constructive conversations around problem solving and take an active role in decision making as appropriate.
- Additional Outcome:
  - NHCSA will employ a multigenerational approach, including the community in matters as deemed appropriate, respecting the experience and perspective members can provide for students.

Charter Goal 4: students will achieve academic success while displaying leadership

- Improved Student Learning Outcomes:
  - Students will develop strong interpersonal skills.
  - Students will demonstrate and maintain strong interpersonal relationships with peers, teachers, and other members of the school community.
  - Students will demonstrate leadership skills through volunteering efforts and participation in one or more community projects each year.
  - Students will engage in multigrade cohorts to allow for leadership opportunities and mentorship.

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- Students will indicate a strong sense of belonging and pride in the school and community.
- Students in agricultural lead roles will demonstrate public speaking and interpersonal skills by leading presentations and Charter School tours for school guests.

Performance Measures:

Local Measures

- School-administered assessments
- School survey results
- School enrolment and attendance data
- School research
- Observations and reflections
- Historical data

Provincial Measures

- Provincial Achievement Test (PAT) results
- Alberta Education Assurance survey results
  - Some or all of the following formative and summative assessment techniques will be employed:
    1. Self-reflection and appraisal
    2. Samples of student work
    3. Teacher observations and inquiries (both in the classroom and in outdoor learning activities)
    4. Charter developed tests
    5. Rubrics
    6. Standardized provincial assessments
    7. Regular student progress reports
    8. Student portfolios (based around agricultural and environmental projects)
    9. Students Individual Program Plans (IPPs); and
    10. Contracts or independent study records

Charter goals and outcomes will be continually reviewed and improved as teaching and learning progress at the school. NHCSA demonstrates attainment of its goals and anticipated outcomes through these and other predetermined measures, in addition to provincial and Canadian standardized testing.

Students at New Humble Community School (NHCS) will benefit from core curricular concepts and measurable goals being reinforced by experiential learning experiences. As a result, students will achieve improved knowledge retention as well as a deeper understanding. By expanding students' knowledge of agriculture and environmental stewardship, students will develop a deeper understanding of concepts and the ability to transfer learnings from one context to another. Upon completion of high school, NHCS

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students will have received extensive agriculture and environmental experiential learning. This will set students up for future success by easing the transition to agricultural and environmental post-secondary learning and/ or the workplace.

Term of Charter

New Humble Community School Association is currently in its third year of operations of a five-year term. The term of the current charter is from September 1, 2021, to August 31, 2026.

Terms of Reference

The *Charter Schools Regulation* requires that all charter schools in the province be evaluated at least once in the term of their charter. There are a number of purposes for the evaluation of a charter school:

- To provide evidence to the Minister and the board that the charter school is in compliance with provincial requirements and the requirements of the charter, inclusive of charter amendments, approved by the Minister.
- To report to staff, parents, and the community on the success of the charter school and to identify areas of strength and areas that may require additional attention.
- To focus the attention of the board and staff on the goals and objectives of the charter and the need to establish and confirm measurable outcomes and measures.
- To facilitate continuous improvement in the charter school consistent with the assurance requirements of the Ministry and with the local direction established by the charter school community and authorized by the board of directors.

The criteria by which the charter school is evaluated are:

1. The school meets the terms and conditions of its charter and has performance measures that show clear evidence of success.
2. The school operates in a manner consistent with all applicable provincial requirements.
3. The charter school is governed effectively.
4. The school is administered effectively.
5. The school is fiscally viable and responsible.
6. The students, parents, staff, school council and community members consider the school program to be successful.
7. Student success is determined in accordance with Ministerial Order (#028/2020)
8. The charter school shares its innovative practices and learning outcomes with the education community.
9. Student achievement at the charter school is consistently strong or improving.
10. The charter school exhibits in multiple ways an ongoing commitment to engaging students, teachers, parents and community members in a model of continuous improvement.
11. The charter school works collaboratively with stakeholders and demonstrates broad and sustained levels of community engagement.

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12. The charter school uses research-informed practices to create innovative learning environments and improve student learning.

2024 Evaluation Processes

The findings of the evaluation were established using the following processes and activities:

1. The charter school authority was asked to develop and submit to Alberta Education a self-evaluation report based on the 12 criteria named above. (See Part III of this report)
2. Alberta Education established a team of five staff from Field Services, as well as one staff member from Business Operations and Stakeholder Support to review the self-evaluation report submitted by the charter school authority and to determine appropriate school site evaluation processes.
3. Focus group sessions were established to provide opportunities for the board, superintendent, principal, teachers, support staff, students, and parents to share insights about the school's successes and ideas about how the charter school authority might become more effective. On March 19 and 20, 2024, the following processes were conducted:
    - Focus group interviews were conducted with the superintendent, principal, board chair, secretary-treasurer, and teachers.
    - One focus group was held with eight school support staff.
    - One focus group was held with six parents.
    - Two focus groups were held with students from Grades 4 to 6.
4. Evaluation team members participated in indoor and outdoor classroom observations throughout grades K-6 to observe instruction, the design of student learning activities, and student engagement.

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II. EVALUATION CONCLUSIONS, COMMENDATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS & REQUIRED CHANGES

1. The school meets the terms and conditions of its charter and has performance measures that show clear evidence of success.

NHCSA strives to achieve the overarching goal of fostering improved learning outcomes through growth, (environmental) stewardship, and innovation through the focus on agricultural literacy, experiential learning, problem solving, and the achievement of academic success while displaying leadership. During focus group discussions, stakeholders referenced they understood the charter and articulated their understanding effectively.

NHCSA requested an amendment to their charter in January 2023 to expand educational programming from K-6 to K-12. Minister directed NHCSA to review their charter to align with the 2022 Charter School Regulation and resubmit the request to amend the charter. NHCSA submitted a request to amend their charter on January 25, 2024. On March 13, 2024, Minister approved the amended charter for NHCSA as it aligns with all requirements per the Charter School Regulation.

The board of NHCSA demonstrates a commitment to continuous improvement – the amendments to their charter goals and measures were driven by results of the action research undertaken since the establishment of the authority and the board's environmental scan of other charter school authorities' charters. NHCSA has developed and implemented assessments in September 2023 to better track student growth and achievement in measuring charter goals.

Recommendations:

- Continue working with educational professionals, such as Curriculum Consultants, to map out K-12 scope and sequence charter goal expectations to ensure continuity and consistency across grades, alignment with provincial curriculum learning outcomes, and alignment of charter assessments with learning outcomes.
- With the expansion of educational programming to junior high and potentially to senior high levels in the future, the continued monitoring of student learning and assessment to ensure the achievement of both charter goals and the learning outcomes of Alberta's programs of study is recommended.

2. The school operates in a manner consistent with all applicable provincial requirements.

In its first few years of operation, NHCSA has experienced a high turnover in administrative staff, namely the superintendent and secretary-treasurer. During this time, the board provided oversight, ensuring operational continuity and compliance with provincial requirements.

NHCSA follows the new Alberta K-6 Curriculum and has supported the development of teacher competencies within the new curriculum to ensure alignment of agricultural literacy with curricular outcomes.

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Teacher professional development is well supported. Teachers have taken part in professional learning opportunities to support implementing charter goals, new curriculum, and individual professional goals that support their professional growth plan and competency development per the Teacher Quality Standard (TQS). The school complies with Alberta Education planning, reporting, and funding requirements in providing timely information, including annual assurance documents Alberta, such as education plans and annual education results reports.

3. The charter school is governed effectively.

The NHCSA board has played and continues to play an instrumental role in charter authority achievements to date. The board of directors demonstrated a strong understanding of the role charter authorities play in providing choice in education in Alberta.

All governance documents, including society by-laws, board policy, and charter authority procedures, are available on the NHSCA website. School authority stakeholders (board executive, board directors, superintendent, school principal, board standing committees, school council, and parent society) are involved and dedicated to the NHSCA mission and vision. Many stakeholders spoke about the extraordinary number of hours the volunteer board members have committed and continue to commit to the authority.

Commendation:

- A commitment to continuous improvement regarding governance has been noted despite challenges in recruiting and retaining administrative and teaching staff.

Recommendation:

- The board continues working with senior administration to define governance and operational roles. Reviewing and developing policies can clarify these roles, support succession planning, guide individuals, and strengthen the system's overall capacity.

4. The school is administered effectively.

The start-up of the new charter authority and the turnover of senior leadership staff posed challenges for the board. Stakeholders (staff, parents, and board) shared positive changes brought to the charter authority by the recent appointment of an experienced superintendent that includes improved communication between the board and school staff, mentorship and guidance provided to both board directors and school staff, and a growing consideration for sustainable growth and operations.

Since the recruitment of the current superintendent and principal, the board recognizes the opportunity provided by a strong system leader to shift away from operational activity and invest more in their role of advocacy, strategic planning, and communication.

Recommendation:

- In its upcoming strategic planning, the board include recruitment and retention strategies for senior administration and certified staff to realize charter authority

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expansion while maintaining the integrity of the charter philosophy, values, and goals.

5. The school is fiscally viable and responsible.

Through a review of their financial reporting and on-site meetings, NHCSA has demonstrated they are fiscally viable and responsible. Their approach to strategic planning involves the expertise of their board and continual quarterly review of budgets and financial statements with the board, which is an example of the board's responsible approach to fiscal management and practices. The administration referenced building strong working relationships with the board and the small community of Calmar as being vital to the success of NHCSA operations.

The board has cultivated a close relationship with the community where the school resides. The charter's alignment with the priorities of the local agricultural community has supported the school with consistent enrollment at their school. The rate of enrolment growth coupled with strong demand for this type of programming has evolved into a desire for NHCSA to expand their grade offering to grades 7-12. The board indicated they would need to add portables or find a new site to accommodate the extra students in the upcoming school years. They acknowledged that if they could not secure funding from Alberta Education for additional space, the board would fundraise to help fill this funding gap.

Being a small school in a rural community has created some fiscal management pressures that were indicated by the school authority's secretary-treasurer. A key pressure being the school authority's administration has had increased turnover, and with this, the need to transfer organizational knowledge has become a priority. NHCSA is managing this issue by leaning heavily on the board to help with the day-to-day administration of the school. The secretary-treasurer also indicated that some board members will assist full time to ensure completion of obligations. In the same theme of separation of duties, NHCSA should also be commended for keeping the accounting of its agricultural and educational expenses separate.

The last three years of financial audits show that NHCSA is managing its finances effectively. This charter authority has also sustained a very healthy accumulated surplus from operation over the last three years with projections to continue to add to reserves. Enrolment has increased by 4.9% in the 2023/24 school year, and the charter authority has adjusted its certificated staffing F.T.E. accordingly to keep a consistent ratio of students to certificated staff that is in alignment with provincial averages, demonstrating fiscal prudence.

NHCSA is very successful at fundraising and has used this money to fund agriculture-related projects that do not fall under the scope of Education's funding framework. NHCSA has engaged their small community to raise large sums, which they have used to purchase capital assets as well; this shows a determination to succeed with their charter's vision. As school-generated funds are the responsibility of the school management (usually the principal and/or those reporting to him/her), we remind NHCSA that it is the responsibility of school jurisdiction management to develop, maintain, and oversee adherence to appropriate policies and procedures to

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ensure monies related to SGF are received, receipted, recorded, and safeguarded and that proper records are maintained in accordance with Public Sector Accounting Standards (PSAS).

NHCSA's Budget Surplus (Deficit) Summary for the last four years is as follows:

	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023
Actual Expenses	N/A	N/A	$1,447,956	$861,236
Budgeted Expenses	N/A	N/A	$706,995	$1,474,651
Accumulated Surplus (Deficit) **From Operations** (total unrestricted surplus + total operating reserves – the school generated funds)	N/A	N/A	$205,375	$474,772

Commendations:

- The charter authority is commended for their ability to engage their community to raise substantial funds through fundraising for school priorities.
- The charter authority is commended on being innovative in maximizing indoor and outdoor learning spaces.

Recommendations:

- The charter authority is recommended to ensure school-generated funds are received, receipted, recorded, and safeguarded and that proper records are maintained in accordance with PSAS.
- The charter authority is recommended to show extra care in creating boundaries between the roles and responsibilities of board members and staff who are fulfilling multiple obligations.
- We recommend that the charter authority continue to work closely with Alberta Education Capital Planning and School Finance staff to address facility planning, lease costs, and desired expansion.

6. The students, parents, staff, school council, and community members consider the school program to be successful.

Overall, students, parents, and staff at NHCSA see the school program as successful, and parents report high satisfaction with it. Provincial survey results show that parents, teachers, and students feel the school is successful. Yearly satisfaction surveys are conducted with staff, parents, and students. Recent results report high levels of satisfaction from stakeholder groups that NCHSA is meeting its mission.

NHCSA offers a focus on agriculture, outdoor, and hands-on learning that is unique to the area. Students reported feeling accepted, supported, and having input into

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how to make the school even better. Increasing enrolments and goals to expand grade levels into junior high and eventually high school demonstrate high student and parent satisfaction. The use and appropriateness of technology as it relates to their charter continues to be a discussion point for the board.

7. **Student Success: Student success is determined in accordance with Ministerial Order #028/2020.**

   In response to the Ministerial Order (#28/2020), the NHCSA Self-Evaluation Report acknowledges literacy and numeracy as the foundational building blocks of learning. While substantial work has been done and improvements have been made to address the impacts of learning loss due to the pandemic, current results report a need for this continued focus. The administration is in the process of reviewing these results and creating an action plan for the 2024/25 school year. Numeracy and literacy data continue to be reviewed and examined in appropriate reporting measures. As recent results have been inconsistent, teachers will continue to analyze provincial assessment results to adjust practice.

   Spring 2023 Alberta Education Assurance Measures results are Very High in Citizenship (87.8%), Education Quality (95.4%), and Parental Involvement (93.8%). Three areas identified for improvement include Satisfaction with Program Access (61.2%), Program of Studies - At-Risk Students (77.2%), and Program of Studies (70.2%). NHCSA plans to supplement the mental health support in the community by looking at opportunities to contract mental health services to support students. Developing the capacity to support individual student needs will be critical as enrolment grows and the complexity of the learning needs of students increases.

   School staff track student achievement to personalize learning and support individual student needs. Currently, the school is developing student report cards to include charter goals and enhanced learning outcomes such as the achievement of agricultural literacy and environmental stewardship.

8. **The charter school shares its innovative practices and learning outcomes with others in the educational community.**

   The staff at NHCSA continue to initiate partnerships with other education stakeholders, and there is already strong community engagement in the local area. The school, in a relatively short period of time, has become a central part of the community with volunteers and stakeholders who support the school's charter and respond to any fundraising and donation requests.

   The school is hopeful that the recent creation and development of the barnyard will enable the school to gather and host community partners, organize school events, and host field trips for other schools to share innovative practices beyond the local community.

   The Learning in Action website was created in August 2023 for teachers to share updates with the community as well as lessons, highlights, and promoting upcoming events with parents and stakeholders. The school's work with Dr. Bonnie Stelmach

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has sparked student interest in research and led to the initiation of student-focused research projects.

9. **Student achievement at the charter school is consistently strong or improving**.

   It is evident that NHCSA contributes to a welcoming, caring, and respectful learning environment, which supports students in being engaged academically, feeling a sense of belonging, and experiencing academic success. Students, staff, and parents often spoke about the positive atmosphere and strong sense of community at NHCSA, which impacts achievement.

   The outdoor learning areas (including barns, pens, and garden plots) allow students to apply knowledge, understanding, and skills in real-life contexts, enabling teacher collaboration and professional development. As these learning spaces are still in the early stages, it is difficult to ascertain their impact on student achievement. However, the board has prioritized those outdoor learning areas and has reviewed their charter goals as part of the charter amendment process.

   While the school continues to analyze and determine priorities, professional development (PD) is a foundational element of continuous improvement. NHCSA's Education Plan includes PD days categorized into three categories: charter specific, First Nations, Métis and Inuit education, and individual teacher professional growth.

   Efforts to include First Nation practices and knowledge were referenced in focus group sessions, including learning about Indigenous planting techniques, assemblies about the Seven Sacred Teachings, and connecting with Mother Earth Charter School. These actions demonstrate a commitment to building staff and student knowledge and understanding of First Nations, Métis and Inuit histories, cultures, and perspectives, including the legacy of residential schools and treaties.

10. **The charter school exhibits in multiple ways ongoing commitment to engaging students, teachers, parents and community members in a model of continuous improvement.**

    NHCSA engages in a continuous improvement cycle, including opportunities for parents, students, staff, and community members to provide valued feedback. The collected data was analyzed and led to the refinement of charter goals and measures, approved charter amendments, the development of local surveys, and the identification of new goals (increased student voice, support of teaching faculty, and review of authority policies and procedures).

    The school authority has invested in the professional development of their staff. The staff highlighted the depth and breadth of their professional development opportunities, including literacy and numeracy development, supporting Indigenous foundational knowledge, and strengthening teacher competencies within the new K-6 curriculum while developing alignment with agricultural literacy. Staff demonstrate growing levels of knowledge, excitement, and commitment to authentically embed their professional learning to support the learners they serve.

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Commendation:

- The board is ambitious, efficient, and committed to continuous improvement and growth. This culture permeates the school's faculty and school community.

Recommendation:

- The focus on capacity building and innovation should be balanced. Rapid initial growth by the board and founding members might not be sustainable in the long term. A measured approach will ensure sustainability and the consolidation of evidence-informed practice.

11. The charter school works collaboratively with stakeholders and demonstrates broad and sustained levels of community engagement.

NHCSA is an active school community at all levels (classroom, school, parent volunteers and committees, school faculty, board, school neighbours, surrounding businesses, and residents). There is evidence that community is an integral and critical part of the philosophy, values, and lived experience of NHCSA.

Students recognized the importance of collaboration and valued the experience and expertise of local speakers and presenters who come to the school. School faculty (teachers, principal, and superintendent) appreciated that the school's agricultural experiences could not be realized without volunteer hours, donations in kind (steer, feed, and building materials), and fundraising from the community.

The board of NHSCA has created mechanisms to ensure community involvement and engagement, including town halls, the school authority website, social media bulletins, standing committees, as well as both the school council and parent society. The board leverages these touchpoints to provide updates, gather input through local surveys, and continue seeking new ways to reach potential members and partners through flyers and community billboards.

12. The charter school uses research-informed practices to create innovative learning environments and improve student learning.

NHCSA recognizes the expectation that charter schools conduct their own research to evaluate innovative and unique aspects of their charter.

The school hosts an annual Hand in Hand fundraiser to enhance charter initiatives. On April 22, 2022, a community engagement dinner under the theme "Growing Together" also introduced and presented initial research conducted at the school by Dr. Bonnie Stelmach of the University of Alberta. Results demonstrated support from students, teachers, and parents for the positive effects of experiential learning with animals on student engagement as well as on the development, understanding, and retention of conceptual information. In the fall of 2023, a longitudinal study was launched with a focus on understanding how the utilization of agricultural literacy, experiential learning, and land stewardship supports children's academic achievement and development of life skills.

The board and administration shared the challenge of tracking students' achievement of charter goal outcomes and are prioritizing the creation of charter

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assessments to measure success and provide data that will inform instructional design supporting charter goals and improving student learning.

Recommendation:

- As the new curriculum is implemented, instructional design (planning, instruction, and assessment) should inform and be informed by a framework (charter scope and sequence) as well as the new provincial curriculum to ensure consistency and continuity across grades and teaching faculty.

Conclusion

As a result of our evaluation processes, the Alberta Education Evaluation Team is satisfied that the New Humble Community School Association is meeting the requirements of legislation and regulations for charter schools. There is some variance in the degree to which the evaluation criteria are met. This variance is reflected in the commendations and recommendations identified in the body of this report. As NHCSA moves forward in its endeavour to provide the best possible education for students, it is encouraged to celebrate its successes while implementing the recommendations and directions provided by the Alberta Education Evaluation team.

The Alberta Education Evaluation Team extends its sincere thanks to the board, administration, staff, students, and parents for their time, perspectives, insights, and hospitality.

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APPENDIX

NHCSA's Self-Evaluation Report

November 2023

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CHARTER AUTHORITY SELF-EVALUATION

New Humble Community School Association

November 30, 2023

INTRODUCTION

New Humble Community School Association (NHCSA) is the charter authority for New Humble Community School (NHCS), a public charter school located approximately 35 minutes southwest of Edmonton, Alberta in Leduc county. NHCS offers a unique learning experience through the use of agriculture, environment & stewardship as an instrument for experiential hands-on learning. NHCSA is currently in its third year of operations of a five year term and as such, has prepared this self-evaluation as part of the charter renewal process. Included within this self-evaluation are macro and micro revelations, key indicators of success, current obstacles and challenges, solution-focussed initiatives, Three-Year Education Plan (EP) commitments, and other relevant information. The information is divided into the twelve indicators of success as required by Alberta Education.

CHARTER CONDITIONS

Since its inception, NHCSA has focussed on the overarching goal "to foster improved learning outcomes through growth, stewardship, and innovation" (NHCSA, *Charter document*, p. 5). This goal is achieved through the following measurable outcomes.

Outcome 1: Students will recognize and understand agricultural literacy.

Charter developed tests were created in spring 2023 by the Charter Development Committee to obtain student achievement in Charter-specific areas. A pilot of the Charter developed tests were administered in June 2023. Beginning in the fall of 2023, the refined Charter test was administered and these results will be compared to those results obtained after the June 2024 administration. Results thus far have shown promise but no concrete determinations can be made until additional results are obtained and analyzed.

Measures to inform comprehension and application of agricultural literacy also include the use of teacher agricultural trackers (or ag trackers). Teachers were able to track their incorporation of agricultural literacy, environmental stewardship, and innovation through the use of weekly and monthly ag trackers for a better overview of what and how much Charter-specific instruction took place within their classrooms.

Teacher observations further inform student comprehension of agricultural literacy as appropriate for the respective grade level. Agriculture outcomes were created by teachers to further strengthen assessment methods. Agricultural programming has expanded since inception. Students now have the opportunity to participate in varied, goal-oriented learning experiences. While teachers incorporate agriculture projects into lessons as applicable, students also have the opportunity to participate in daily chores and families volunteer to complete chores on weekends and non school days. These include

- Animal husbandry- experience obtained through goats, rabbits, pot belly pigs (no longer operational) and barn cat projects
- Agriculture production (market)- experience obtained through steer (beef), laying hens, broiler chickens, laying ducks, sheep, and garden projects

- Reproduction- experience obtained through chicken and duck egg hatching, and sheep breeding projects
- Miscellaneous- experience obtained through bottle calf project (will not be implemented in the 2023-2024 year)

Outcome 2: Students will demonstrate problem solving through adaptability, resilience, and critical thinking.

Measures within this outcome primarily focus on assessment and discussion. Through the formative and summative assessment methods listed on page 5 of our *Charter Document*, students show individual levels of achievement of this outcome. Individual thoughts and determinations are taken into consideration for improvements with current projects and in the consideration for new ones. Examples of how student feedback has informed projects include

- Choosing to not continue with pot belly pig and bottle calf projects primarily due to lack of diversity in learning opportunities
- Choosing to implement steer (beef) project
- Individual grades choose what vegetable seeds to sow in the garden in the spring and then process the harvest the following fall

Students further these crucial skills in conjunction with in-school presentations with industry experts (ex. In spring 2023 a local Veterinarian brought in a lambing simulator to explain the process of lambing to students, in fall 2023 a local feed expert taught students how to properly measure and ration feed for the steers to maximize growth), off-site nature hikes on adjacent land, learning in and out of the classroom, non-traditional classes for older students including Outdoor and Hunter's Education, and incorporation of archery into the physical education program. Additionally, student-led projects such as building grain silos, leading school yard tours, delivering presentations, public speaking, and stakeholder engagement provides natural experiences for students to demonstrate this outcome that is easily transferable to real life situations.

Outcome 3: Students will understand the value of goals and outcomes.

A fundamental component of experiential learning is focussed reflection (The Association for Experiential Education, 2023). NHCS students are expected to take part in self-reflection activities to inform their understanding of the value in lesson goals and outcomes. As appropriate, teacher observation and guidance is utilized to further student understanding and assist in making connections to curricular objectives. Student portfolios (sometimes referred to as learning journals) and individual program plans (IPPs) are examples of formal assessment methods universally used as appropriate. Informal assessment methods include group discussion, whether this is school-wide, classroom, or multi-grade cohort specific. Yearly student surveys provide greater insight into the level of achievement for this outcome.

Outcome 4: Students will achieve academic success while displaying leadership

A plethora of opportunities are available for students to achieve academic success while displaying leadership. Experiential education offers the opportunity for natural leaders to take an

active role in informing academic success. Multi-grade cohorts take place on bi-monthly agriculture fun/ learning afternoons. The focus of each afternoon varies and includes farm safety, rodeo, Indigenous winter games, etc. Students are divided into multi-grade groups to encourage teamwork, leadership, building meaningful relationships, critical thinking and analysis, metacognition, and mentorship. Standardized assessments and local measures are utilized to assess levels of academic success (please see section on "Student Achievement" for further information). Opportunities to display leadership are incorporated into daily school functioning such as older students completing morning announcements, setting up and taking down equipment for events, signing up for chore management positions, volunteer efforts, etc. For the 2023 "Hand in Hand" fundraiser event, every class completed a project to donate to the silent auction. Projects included cookies in a jar, birdhouses, artwork, etc.

Current Challenges

- Need to determine refined expectations to meeting and documentation of charter measurable outcomes

Planned actions toward improvement and growth

Moving forward, NHCSA plans to mitigate current challenges and enhance opportunities for growth by continuing to track and reflect upon student progress and success. Incorporation of applicable modern research is key to strengthening the innovative nature of charter schools. The Charter Development Committee has undertaken the priority of developing recommendations for appropriate expectations and documentation to present to the Board. This is an ongoing project that is expected to come to a successful conclusion mid year (2023-2024). Implementation of periodic Charter reviews are an additional method to ensuring results are on par with meeting Charter goals and expectations and presents an opportunity for the consideration of more accurate measures (ex. Standardized tests, locally developed measures, research-informed practices) to be implemented. Establishment of committees further improve Charter conditions and reduce barriers for staff and students to meet Charter goals and objectives.

PROVINCIAL REQUIREMENTS

NHCSA takes great pride in the development and submission of required government reporting methods in a timely manner and posted appropriately (i.e. Annual Educational Results Report (AERR), EP). The "commitment to providing a welcoming, caring, respectful, and safe learning and working environment that respects diversity and fosters a sense of belonging" is vital to the operation of NHCS (NHCSA, Policy 19, p. 58). Recent survey results indicated an overall average of 90.1% of respondents (staff, parents, students) agreeing that NHCS provides this type of environment.

Acts of reconciliation as suggested by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission are being continuously implemented and prioritized at NHCS. Development of a land acknowledgement to be used at the commencement of each meeting, implementation of Indigenous views (such as Indigenous planting techniques, Indigenous school-wide learning activities, assemblies centered around the Seven Sacred Teachings) are a few examples of NHCS's commitment to furthering the knowledge and understanding of Canada and Alberta's Indigenous history and connection. A

relationship has been established with Mother Earth Children's Charter School (MECCS), an Indigenous-focussed charter school to further inform our approach to First Nations, Metis, Inuit (FNMI) educational initiatives.

NHCS continues to operate in accordance with the required number of instructional hours as informed by curricular area. A strategically designed budget allows for the maximization of learning supports. Instruction and support accounts for 78% of the budget, indicative of the primary focus being on the current students.

NHCS's principal successfully completed her Leadership Quality Standard in the summer of 2023.

Current Challenges

- Newly implemented curriculum

Planned actions toward improvement and growth

Moving forward, NHCSA plans to mitigate current challenges and enhance opportunities for growth by continuing to review and reflect upon the Education Act, Charter School Handbook, Charter School Regulations, policies set forth by the Education Ministry, Ministerial Orders, commitments set forth in the EP, etc. The establishment of a relationship with a local Elder is one strategy to provide a deeper understanding of the local Indigenous culture. Teachers are continually working towards strengthening their competencies within the new curriculum.

GOVERNANCE

One of the foundational elements of NHCSA is the collaborative nature between the Charter school authority and the community and stakeholders. As such, deliberate decisions have been made to ensure that the essence of community is incorporated into the decision-making process and governance of NHCS. Some examples of this include

- Formation of a Board of Directors who are all community members and current parents of NHCS students
- Establishment of School Council and Parents Society, including representation at monthly board meetings
- Staff representation at various meetings (through optional attendance at board meetings or through Superintendent, staff liaison at School Council and Parents Society meetings)
- Board representation at School Council meetings
- Working committees (consisting of staff, parents, community members, Board Directors) to recommend suggestions to attend to priorities as determined by the Board of Directors

The Board of Directors are elected by members of the Society at the Annual General Meeting held each fall. The Board endeavors to ensure optimal and efficient governance through continual efforts such as the development and refinement of an annual board work plan.This work plan is taken into consideration by the Board Chair, Vice-Chair, Superintendent, and Secretary- Treasurer when building the meeting agenda. Monthly board meetings are typically held on the third Wednesday of the month and the agendas are sent out in advance to members of

the board. The importance of governance is something that is taken seriously among board members and Roberts Rules of Order are respected and utilized in meeting operations. Two Board Directors took part in Board Governance training in the summer of 2023. Additionally, the Board frequently utilizes The Association of Alberta Public Charter Schools (TAAPCS) resources, including hosting a meeting with TAAPCS Executive Director in November 2023 to gain further guidance on board governance. Relationships with other Alberta Charter Schools are consistently forged for mentorship in ongoing matters.

NHCSA determines priorities and communicates these with appropriate committees. Currently, there are five standing committees, each with revised purposes, ideal number of members, membership expectations, and current priorities. To operate effectively, these committees meet regularly (typically the Thursday prior to the monthly board meeting) and recommendations are submitted to the Board of Directors by the appointed committee chair. Ad hoc committees are established on an as needed basis.

Yearly satisfaction surveys are administered with questions directly geared towards the evaluation of governance. These results are reviewed and discussed by Board Directors. Other assurance methods the Board of Directors review include government issued surveys, the AERR, and EP. The development of Codes of Conduct (Board Directors, staff, students), confidentiality documents, and handbooks have been a priority for the board through these initial years of operation.

Current Challenges

- Review and refinement of Policy and Procedures manual to ensure applicability and accuracy

Planned actions toward improvement and growth

Moving forward, NHCSA plans to mitigate current challenges and enhance opportunities for growth by attending to governance-related matters as they arise in a timely and appropriate manner. The Policy Committee is expected to present policy related recommendations to the board in a sequential manner if possible. Additionally, succession planning to ensure smooth transitions as Board Directors move on, effectively ensuring the continuity of a strong board.

ADMINISTRATION

NHCS features one 0.5 FTE principal who is also a 0.5 FTE teacher. Typical administrative duties include staffing and scheduling, student assessment/ reporting/ IPP development (in collaboration with staff), teacher and staff evaluation and supervision, discipline, student/ staff/ and parental concerns, report cards, etc. The front office features a 1.0 FTE school secretary whose duties include parent communication, addressing immediate student concerns, mail, fielding phone calls and emails and directing them appropriately, attendance, guest assistance, PASI, documentation, student file management, etc. The Superintendent is currently employed at a 0.6 FTE, while the Secretary-Treasurer is a 0.8 FTE. Annual reviews of staff are conducted. Yearly satisfaction surveys assess the level of stakeholder satisfaction in regards to administration. Input is gathered from staff (certificated and non-certificated), parents, and

students. The results help inform future priorities and determine areas for improvement.

Current Challenges

- Limited opportunities for student voice beyond the classroom
- Challenges of navigating targeted administrative budget vs. the volume of work- this leads to a working board vs. governance board

Planned actions toward improvement and growth

Moving forward, NHCSA plans to mitigate current challenges and enhance opportunities for growth by presenting more opportunities for student voice in conjunction with the School Council. Older students should be polled to inform future social events as well as opportunities for volunteering.To navigate the targeted administrative budget and the volume of work, the Board plans to clearly define committee roles and administrative responsibilities for supporting committees. Furthermore, clear identification of school-based administrative support opportunities would help to appropriately disperse work and maximize opportunities for creative and ethical use of finances.

FISCALLY VIABLE

NHCSA's focus is on ensuring the success of current students. As such, 78% of the budget is allotted to instruction and support. An annual audit is completed after the conclusion of the fiscal year (August) and in accordance with all necessary regulations. Furthermore, the audit confirms the school is undergoing sufficient and appropriate accounting procedures. The Finance and Audit Committee's purpose is two-fold, first is to assist the Board of Directors in fulfilling their oversight responsibilities for the financial process, the system of internal control over financial reporting, the audit process, and monitoring the division's compliance with laws and regulations pertaining to financial operations. The second is to make recommendations to the Board in regards to financial planning, budgets, and allocation of targeted grants.

As with many Charter schools in Alberta, finances prove to be a challenge. NHCSA overcomes challenges by supplementing finances through extensive fundraising efforts (through both NHCSA and the Parents Society) and community sponsors. Increased student enrollment and changes to funding have alleviated previous financial challenges.

Current Challenges

- Ongoing financial concerns (supported vs. unsupported funds and purchases)

Planned actions toward improvement and growth

Moving forward, NHCSA plans to mitigate current challenges and enhance opportunities for growth by continuing to hold our annual "Hand in Hand" fundraiser to enhance Charter initiatives. Continual monitoring of finances and critical assessment of priorities is essential to ensuring NHCSA remains fiscally responsible and viable.

SUCCESSFUL

Student enrollment has steadily increased over the past 3 years. NHCS commenced in 2021 with 86 students and as of fall 2023, there are 128 students enrolled. Staff numbers have also increased, as allowed by funding, to accommodate the growth in student enrollment. Great interest has also been shown in the planned expansion of grades offered at NHCS.

Yearly satisfaction surveys are conducted with staff, parents, and students. The most recent results show high levels of satisfaction among teachers, educational assistants, parents, and students in NHCS meeting its mission. Parent feedback across the board tends to be very positive, with results generally being maintained over the years, as does the high level of parental involvement. Minor declines are shown in student results, varying by area.

Current Challenges

- Breadth of availability and access to program of studies including fine arts, career, technology, health and physical education
- Ease and accessibility to programs for students at risk
- Concerns over accessibility, effectiveness, and efficiency of programs and services for services in their community

Planned actions toward improvement and growth

One of the continuous challenges NHCSA faces is small sample sizes skewing results. With this reality in mind, NHCSA plans to mitigate current challenges and enhance opportunities for growth by offering opportunities for parental involvement within the school and community to maintain cohesiveness and sense of belonging. Increased communication involvement at macro and micro levels to ensure staff, parents, students, and other stakeholders have a clear understanding of the philosophy, mission, and vision of the Charter. NHCSA will strive to ensure future communications highlight the fine arts, career, technology, health, and physical education activities that are currently occurring within the Charter. This will help to counter any unfounded perceptions that such activities are absent within the school. NHCSA will continue to work with local services and community partners to improve the depth and breadth of programs. Acquiring staff feedback will further identify these gaps. Networking and partnerships are highly prioritized to increase the success of the Charter and more importantly of the students and families within our community. School-based surveys will specifically target areas of improvement to clearly define any gaps in communication or programming opportunities for students. NHCSA continues to discuss appropriateness of technology within the Charter.

STUDENT SUCCESS

Ministerial Order (#028/2020) advises that numeracy and literacy are fundamental for learning and should be evident in all subject matter and grades. Outcomes for learning include knowledge development, character development, and community engagement. Efforts are continually being made to better attend to acts of reconciliation. This includes deeper learning and understanding at

the student, teacher, parental, and community levels.

Additional funding provided in late 2022 allowed for advancement of efforts to address numeracy and literacy concerns. A literacy and numeracy team was established and prioritized addressing gaps identified in Grade two and three reading skills; Grade one sight words, phonemic and letter knowledge. Assistance was provided through individual pullout sessions and small group sessions. Resource carts were developed with grade and development appropriate resources, manipulatives, and activities to inform session activities. Additional support and resources (hands-on manipulatives) were obtained to support most grade's mathematics curriculum. Please see the "Research-Informed" section for specific numeracy and literacy measures.

Students continue to be involved in bi-monthly school-wide agricultural fun/ learning afternoons (see section on "Charter Conditions" for additional information. We believe that through these events, students are presented with the opportunity to achieve all four charter outcomes (please see section on "Charter Conditions"). Oftentimes, guest speakers are invited to address students on a relevant topic. Furthermore, NHCS students are encouraged to think beyond themselves and their cohort. They make connections to their community, identify the resources or needs that are present, and through curricular ties, further expand these concepts to the idea of being a global citizen. We are inundated with comments from guests that speak to how different and welcoming NHCS is, how involved and willing the students are, along with how knowledgeable they are in areas such as agriculture. This is interpreted in itself as student success.

Current Challenges

- Measurement of student success

Planned actions toward improvement and growth

Moving forward, NHCSA plans to mitigate current challenges and enhance opportunities for growth by networking and developing mutually beneficial partnerships. Defining student success has proven to be subjective and open for interpretation. Overarching measures to better measure student success and provide necessary data is an area of evolving priority. NHCSA is currently reviewing the Charter measurable goals as part of a Charter Amendment process. Further definition of these measures will result in future connections and defined parameters of student success.

SHARING PRACTICES

Sharing of practices occur at the macro and micro level. The Board continues to engage with Alberta Education partners, other Charter school authorities, and various industry experts with whom mutually beneficial relationships can be established and information shared. Board sharing practice initiatives include monthly submissions to the local community newspaper, blog articles featured on the website, and social media posts such as the popular "Learning in Action" series in spring 2023.

Teachers have collaborated with educators in other school districts including professional

development sessions occurring at MECCS and Altario School. They continue to foster relationships as needed. The recent proposal of a teacher-created (school) website to showcase and communicate examples of Charter learning to parents and stakeholders is another sharing practice that will be launched in December 2023. This website will operate in conjunction with the NHCSA website.

New families are welcome to schedule a tour to determine the suitability of NHCS for their child (children) and to ask questions or address concerns. A welcome back barbeque is held annually at the beginning of the year (hosted by the Parents Society). As NHCS currently only offers K-6, the need has risen to support the transition of students graduating to other schools. Measures have been taken to offer students and parents an opportunity to meet with the local junior high/ high school principal prior to this transition.

Current Challenges

- Extending our reach to share practices

Planned actions toward improvement and growth

Moving forward, NHCSA plans to mitigate current challenges and enhance opportunities for growth by continually searching for ways to further our voice. The creation of a resource tab featured within the school website will be overseen by the teachers as a way to share innovative practices with the education community. From NHCSA's inception, the potential to offer professional development in-services and other learning opportunities for teachers and students in other divisions has been a goal and work continues to occur to make this a reality. Our established research partnership continues to inform modern research initiatives and is discussed in greater detail further on in this evaluation.

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Student achievement varies by curricular area. Over the past two years, Grade six Provincial Achievement Test (PAT) results have been inconsistent. This is in part due to our small class sizes potentially skewing results. Additional local measures include the Charter developed tests mentioned earlier in the section on "Charter Conditions". We expect these measures to provide specific data on Charter goals and objective achievement.

While substantial work has been done and improvements have been made to address the impacts of COVID-19 upon student learning and functional grade level, there is still room for furtherment. Numeracy and literacy initiatives resulted in increased numeracy growth ranging from 8-24 months and literacy growth ranging from 20-24 months in the first academic year. These evolving results continue to be reflected and examined in appropriate reporting measures and discussed with parents/ legal guardians as needed.

Current Challenges

- Absence of mental health support may be hindering student achievement (further impacted due to rurality)
- Lack of agricultural literacy, environmental stewardship, and innovation evaluation on

student reporting measures
- Subpar 2022-2023 student numeracy and literacy results

Planned actions toward improvement and growth
Moving forward, NHCSA plans to mitigate current challenges and enhance opportunities for growth by monitoring and assessing financials to look for opportunities to contract mental health services to support students. Continued tracking of students, adaptation of programs including taking into account individual student diagnoses and needs, and implementation of research-informed practices will inform decisions and determine areas of future priority. Teachers will analyze and determine appropriate strategies to raise overall PAT results to "Acceptable" and "Excellence" standards. Teachers will continue to explore viable opportunities and strategies to implement Charter methods to intertwine into curricular objectives, increase student retention of curricula, and meet charter goals and outcomes. Another need that has been identified is for student report cards to include a more thorough examination and communication of agricultural literacy, environmental stewardship, and innovation measures. The teacher's objective is to determine appropriate measures to implement starting in the 2023-2024 academic year. The 2022-2023 Numeracy and Literacy results indicated regression in multiple grades and categories. The NHCS administration will review these results and strategies and create a clear action plan to adjust the strategic plan and methods for the 2023-2024 academic year.

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Part of the underlying decision-making strategy to determine NHCSA priorities is the solution-focused mindset to continuous improvement of the Charter. Decisions and strategies often have the longevity, sustainability, and stability of the Charter at the forefront. Programming, community, facility, parental engagement, student achievement, and staffing are a few factors that greatly influence level of improvement.

As areas of improvement arise, the school's continuous improvement cycle, committees, and communication methods provide opportunities for input and impact from parents, staff, students, and community members. Volunteers in school have a positive impact upon student and staff life. Collaborative efforts have been made through School Council, Parents Society, Board, staff, and community to offer engaging learning opportunities and potential for feedback/ problem solving.

Professional development (PD) is a foundational element of continuous improvement and the school continues to analyze and determine the most important areas to focus on. As informed by the EP, PD days are categorized three ways, Charter specific, FNMI, and Teacher Preference. Examples of impactful PD include Hour Zero and First Aid training, FNMI, TAAPCS conferences, Alberta Rural Education Symposium, Forest School training, Risky Play training, curriculum incorporation led by Dr. Stelmach, occupational therapist presentation, etc.

Current priorities of the Board include addressing the everpresent facility and educational space challenges. As NHCS is over capacity, the Board, through the Facility Committee has worked tirelessly with Capital Planning and Alberta Education to find solutions that are financially responsible and align with our Charter.

To keep up to the continuously evolving inclusion of and focus on technology within society, the Board has spent countless hours determining the role of technology within the Charter. A great deal of thought has been put into appropriate use of technology while avoiding drifting from the vision and mission of the Charter. While this continues to be a topic of discussion, class sets of Chromebooks have been purchased along with the procurement of smart projectors.

Current Challenges

- Space constraints
- Challenge to be able to expand programming offered directly related to limited educational space
- Lack of autonomy over site location
- Appropriateness of technology within the Charter
- Isolation from interdivisional student opportunities
- 2022 -2023 Assurance measures indicated low teacher satisfaction

Planned actions toward improvement and growth

Moving forward, NHCSA plans to mitigate current challenges and enhance opportunities for growth by continuing to provide substantive assurance documents (that are well developed in their depth and breadth of information). Increased partnerships and networking opportunities remain to be an area of focus to aid continued growth of the Charter. Opportunities for increased student involvement in local, provincial, or national experiences should be sought to increase cohesiveness among the learning community.

The Facility Committee continues to search for alternatives to increase instructional space to alleviate space constraints within the school and expand the programming that is offered at NHCS. Although viable modular opportunities are infrequent, the Board remains committed to the search for financially and environmentally responsible solutions. They also continue to work with other stakeholders to further the conversation and determine appropriate plans of action.

The Board continues to consider the role technology should play within the Charter, especially considering new curricular objectives. The Board's priority surrounding integration of technology in the classroom focuses on ensuring it is employed as a tool to support the charter methods and appropriateness in making agricultural literacy connections. Insight has been informally obtained from students, staff, parents, and community members that continues to inform the conversation and decision making process.

After teacher surveys were conducted in June 2022, it became apparent that there was low satisfaction present relating to a portion of the assurance measures. The Board has recognized this as an area to clearly identify the source and topic(s) leading to the low satisfaction levels. Moving forward, initiatives such as press releases (to ensure clear information is being relayed), regular Board updates at staff meetings, and continuing to obtain mentorship into governance practices (as mentioned in the section on "Governance") will be implemented to improve teacher satisfaction. Additionally, a mid-year teacher survey will be administered to current teachers to assess satisfaction levels, define areas of improvement, and determine accuracy of the fall 2023 areas of improvement.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Community is a cornerstone of NHCS. There remains a high priority on community engagement within the Board and School. The diverse opinions from those within the community are taken into consideration and used to inform decisions (ie. it was from community input that NHCSA pursued the amendment of our charter to include offering grades 7-12 in 2023). At times, town hall meetings are held to gather specific feedback and determine how to proceed (ex. Community dinner held by University of Alberta researcher Dr. Bonnie Stelmach on April 22, 2022 to inform future research topics, the Facility Committee held a town hall meeting on July 12, 2023 to address the topic of land title and the potential expansion and modernization). NHCS frequently invites guest speakers from various community businesses to address students and provide industry insight.

NHCSA utilizes social media and digital platforms as the primary vessel for community engagement. Additional forms of community engagement were discussed previously in the "Sharing Practices" section. Earlier this year, the "Humble Hands Memorial Gazebo" was constructed at NHCS to honour those influential community members who are no longer with us. Yearly community events are held at the school (ex. Trunk or Treat, Winter Skate) with focus on giving back to local charities (i.e. Food Bank, Mustard Seed). Monthly meetings held by the School Council to inform conversation on school direction, planning, challenges, and policy.

Tours of the school are often offered to industry supporters and have proven to be greatly successful and appreciated. For example, in the past, we have received additional support in the form of donations to our breakfast program along with offers to volunteer with projects as they arise from these tours.

Current Challenges

- Limited reach of information- not all interested parties are on social media and digital platforms

Planned actions toward improvement and growth

Moving forward, NHCSA plans to mitigate current challenges and enhance opportunities for growth by continuing to forge community partnerships and strengthen existing ones. Initial steps have been taken to establish contact with post secondary institutions to explore potential partnerships. Work on this front will continue. Input from the community should continue to be sought and taken into consideration as needed. Communication efforts should be reviewed and expanded upon as needed ex. Thought and discussion continues around the creation and development of a community billboard has occurred in the past, along with a potential quarterly community flyer to be posted locally.

RESEARCH-INFORMED

NHCS has been fortunate to have established a successful research partnership with University of Alberta (U of A) researcher, Dr. Bonnie Stelmach (PhD, MA, BEd) and her assistant

(rotational). Dr. Stelmach

- Hosted a community engagement dinner, “Growing Together”, held on April 22, 2022 to develop and inform research initiatives
- Completed a pilot study (qualitative) completed in the spring of 2022 *Pepper and Triscuit go to school: Elementary students learning with and from animals* where the curricular areas of focus were on physical education and wellness (PEW) and English language arts and literature.
    - The research sample consisted of teachers (focus group and three individual interviews), seven student interviews, and one parent interview. Classroom/ school event observations, focus groups with teachers, and individual interviews (with teachers, students, and parents) were conducted.
    - Data indicated that the students, teachers, and parents concluded that experiential learning with animals had a positive impact upon student learning and on the development, understanding, and retention of conceptual information. These results are discussed in greater detail in our most recent AERR.
- Initiated a second, longitudinal study in the fall of 2023, *School is such a chore! Agriculture as a lens for enhancing learning and life skills (2023-2026)*.
    - Focus of this study is on understanding how the utilization of agricultural literacy, experiential learning, and land stewardship supports children’s academic achievement and development of life skills. Research question posed is “how does experiential learning through agriculture foster curricular connections and life skills in K-6 students?”.
    - Participants in this study include current NHCS students, alumni, parents, and staff.
- Completes yearly professional development in-services with staff to further develop goals, strategies, and frameworks for charter outcomes into core lessons.
- Provided the “Literature synthesis on the impact of agriculture education and experiential learning among secondary school students” to support NHCSA’s 7-12 Charter amendment request.

Significant time and research has gone into determining the most appropriate, research-informed resources for improved student learning and retention. Tools such as Fountas and Pinnell have been deliberately implemented to assess, track student achievement, and inform future program planning across all grades. Charter methods of instruction have also been prioritized due to the substantial amount of research on the success of each practice. Overarching, is the high importance placed upon experiential education, hands-on learning based upon concrete experience supported by critical analysis, reflection, and synthesization (The Association for Experiential Education, 2023).

Current Challenges

- NHCS teachers continue to explore the connection between agricultural literacy, innovation, and environmental stewardship with areas of curriculum that present more challenges for direct correlation and integration to be made i..e. Social Studies. This has also been further complicated with the adoption of a new curriculum in Alberta.
- Best methods to share research-informed practices with the larger community

Planned actions toward improvement and growth

Moving forward, NHCSA plans to mitigate current challenges and enhance opportunities for growth by continuing to research and use research-informed practices to support innovation and learning among NHCS students. The school and community remains committed to the mission and vision of the school. Further thought will be directed toward sharing practices, challenges, and successes with the larger community. Potential ideas include developing additional partnerships, speaking/ presenting at conferences, etc.

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