



**FERRIS STATE
UNIVERSITY**
IMAGINE MORE

**MICHIGAN CONNECTIONS
ACADEMY**

MID-CONTRACT REVIEW
March 9-10, 2016

FERRIS STATE UNIVERSITY Charter Schools Office (CSO)

Declaration of Intent and Purpose

Next to the authorization of a Public School Academy (PSA), the oversight, evaluation, and reauthorization of that Academy are the most important tasks a State authorizer performs. The Ferris State University Charter Schools Office (FSU-CSO) accomplishes this responsibility in two stages:

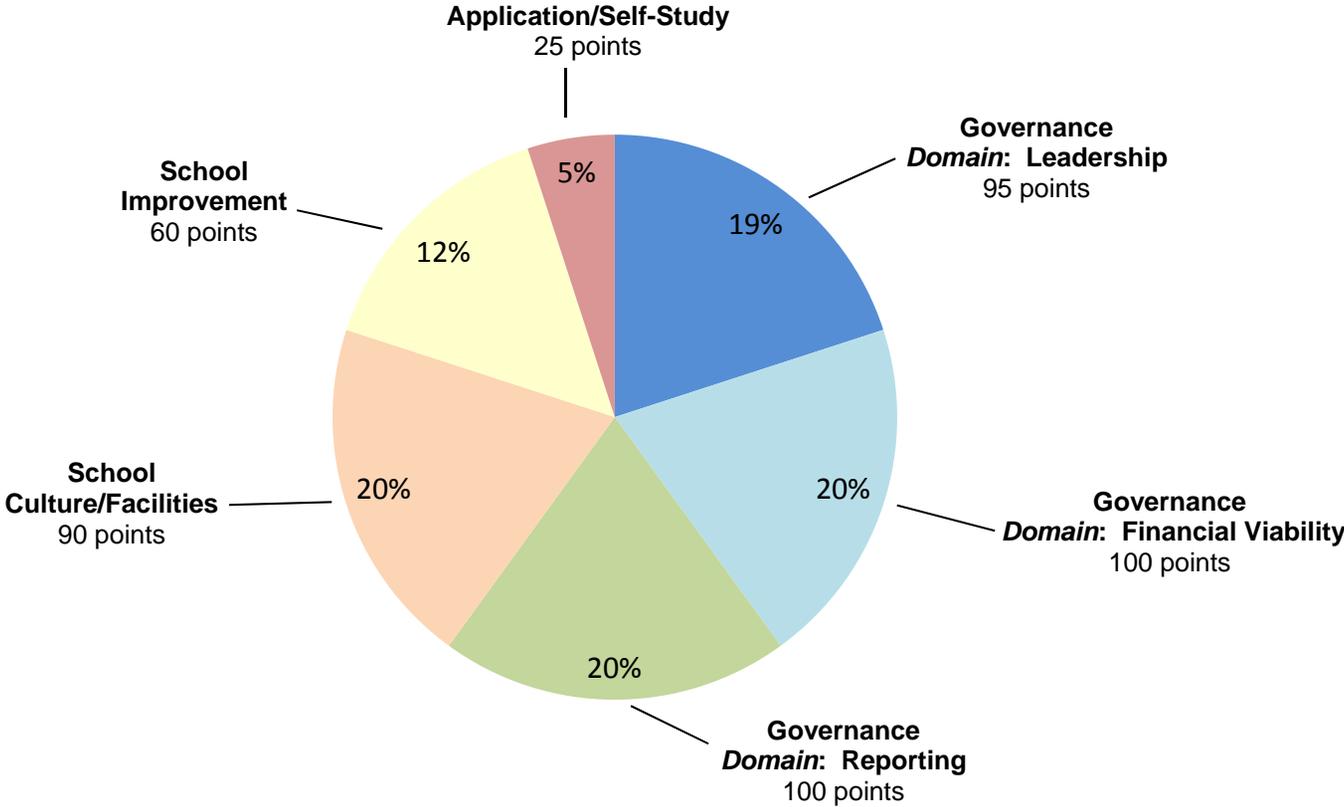
1. **Academic Performance Report.** All FSU-authorized academies receive an *Academic Performance Report* in August. This report is a comprehensive analysis of the Academy's progress towards their contractual educational goals and contains extensive information about student performance levels on a wide variety of measures including Career/College Readiness Goals. Part A of the Contractual Educational Goals and related measures states: "The Academy shall pursue the educational goal of preparing all students academically for success in college, work, and life." Benchmark goals for grades 2-12 are included in the charter contract.
2. **Mid-Contract Review or Reauthorization Review.** All FSU-authorized academies undergo two team visitation reviews during each contractual period as per contractual requirement. The first, the *Mid-Contract Review*, takes place at the mid-way point of the contractual period. The second, the *Reauthorization Review*, is held in the fall of the last academic year of the charter contract. Both Reviews are significant events in the life cycle of a PSA. The Mid-Contract Review and the Reauthorization Review cover aspects of Academy performance separate from academic performance reported in the Annual Academic Performance report such as: Governance, School Culture, and School Improvement.

While all stages of an Academy's evaluation are significant, the CSO emphasizes that the Annual Academic Performance Report and an Academy's progress towards their contractual educational goals are the *most important factor* in determining recommendations to the FSU Board of Trustees regarding Reauthorization. *It is not possible to successfully pass a review with an Academic Performance Report that falls below "Meeting Standards."*

This report was prepared by a Visitation Team comprised of CSO members. The Team may also have included one or more outside reviewers hired for this specific review. All attempts have been made to make the report as factual as possible based on data, interviews, observations, and documentation provided by the Academy and/or gathered by the interviewers. *All data contained in this report are deemed as **accurate as possible** by the Charter Schools Office at the time this report was prepared. For further information on CSO Reviews, please visit our website: www.ferris.edu/charterschools.*

Mid-Contract/Reauthorization Review: Formula 2014-2015

Visitation Rubric



Total Score		
428 - 475	Exceeding Standards	90%+
321 - 427	Meeting Standards	75% - 89%
192 - 320	Does Not Meet Standards	60% - 74%
191 & Below	Falls Far Below Standards	Below 60%

Mid-Contract/Reauthorization Review: Point Tally Sheet 2013-2014

Academy Name: **Michigan Connections Academy**

Dates of Visit: **March 9-10, 2016**

This is a: Reauthorization Review Mid-Contract Review

Visitation Review

Evaluation Criteria	Points Possible	Points Achieved	Percentage Achieved	Category Achieved
Governance <i>Domain: Leadership</i>	95	88.75	93.42	Exceeding Standards
Governance <i>Domain: Financial Viability</i>	100*	90	90	Meeting Standards
Governance <i>Domain: Reporting</i>	100*	87.5	87.5	Meeting Standards
School Culture/Facilities	95*	95	100	Meeting Standards
School Improvement	60	53.75	89.58	Meeting Standards
Application/Self-Study	25	23.5	94	Exceeding Standards
Total Score:	475	438.5	92.31	Exceeding Standards

Visitation Review Scoring Matrix

maximum: 475 points

428-475	Exceeding Standards	90%+
321-427	Meeting Standards	75% - 89%
192-320	Does Not Meet Standards	60% - 74%
191 & Below	Falls Far Below Standards	Below 60%

*It is not possible to *Exceeds Standards* in the Governance *Domain: Financial Viability* and *Reporting*, or School Culture/Facilities sections.

Visiting Team Members

Name: Dr. Phyllis Robinson

Signature: *Phyllis E. Robinson*

Name: Laura Emshanov

Signature: *Laura Emshanov*

Name:

Signature:

Name:

Signature:

Team Chair: Jim Scholten

Signature: *James K. Scholten*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Michigan Connections Academy Mid-Contract Review

March 9 – 10, 2016

The Executive Summary is a review of the findings of the Ferris State University Charter Schools Office three (3) member review team visitation conducted on March 9-10, 2016.

The team was able to complete a walkthrough of the academy observing teachers working in their on-line classrooms. The team was able to complete phone interviews with school board members, parents, and students. The team was also able to conduct on site interviews with instructional staff, SIT (School Improvement Team), support staff, and administrators. Each group was able to share with us their thoughts about the academy in a very clear and open manner. We appreciate the understanding, care, and interest they have in the success of each student who attends the academy.

The review team also completed the mid-contract review rubric. The rubric considers the academy's progress in the areas of leadership, financial viability, reporting, culture/facilities, and school improvement. The team also considered the mid-contract application. The team is pleased to report that the academy scored a total of **438.5 points** out of a possible 475 points for a percent score of **92.31%**. This places the academy at the "Exceeding Standards" rating of the review rubric. This is a very good score, however it is important to understand that the APR (Academic Performance Report) is also an important part of the review. It is not possible to successfully pass a review with an Academic Performance Report that falls below "Meeting Standards."

Following are some positive highlights from our interviews:

- There are strong, collaborative internal practices embedded in the academy. All stakeholders feel involved, listened to, and valued.
- There is open communication. All staff input for improvement is valued.
- The culture promotes innovation and creativity. The staff is comfortable taking risks without fear of criticism or rejection.
- Meeting the individual learning needs of each student is a priority. This allows each student to meet their maximum potential.
- The school leadership cultivates the positive, family culture. Everyone is encouraged to share their unique talents and insights to help everyone be successful.
- The staff mentoring program is strong, organized, and helpful for new staff.
- The new "bi-weekly calls" program promotes overall communication. It is helpful and well received by students and parents. They feel they get timely response on all concerns or questions. The staff has indicated they are willing to communicate with students or parents on a 24/7 basis as needed.
- The staff is flexible and accommodating as they work to meet state requirements and student needs.
- The staff is able to effectively interpret and use student achievement data to improve instruction and learning.
- The "Live Learning" sessions are liked and helpful for students. The ability to replay these as needed is helpful.
- Parents appreciate all efforts to meet the individual needs of their children.
- There is a belief and drive that everything the school does is in a constant state of improvement and growth.
- The academic rigor and high expectations are evident, monitored, and reinforced.

- The field trips are considered by all to be helpful and appreciated.
- The students really enjoy the school for a variety of reasons – teachers care, flexibility, and help when you don't understand.
- The multiple opportunities for staff and students to communicate and connect is very helpful and appreciated.
- The board is very supportive of the staff and leadership. They appreciate all of the data presented to them that indicate what is happening within the school.

Following are some opportunities for continued growth:

- A plea was made for quality, hard bound textbooks for 6th and 7th grade science. It is noted that all students cannot be at a computer for long periods of time – so hard copy books and supplemental materials are appropriate alternatives for those who need them.
- It was stated that “Educational Technology” class could be improved. Currently it is redundant and not very helpful from the students’ perspective.
- “Discovery Education” videos are sometimes less than adequate – some don’t work well and others present content that needs to be improved.
- The students requested more training in advanced computer skills like coding.
- There seems to be a need for a dedicated recording studio for teachers to prepare “need to know” lesson videos.
- In your promotional/recruitment materials, it may be helpful to further clarify the difference between your “online instruction” model and traditional “online courses.” A better understanding prior to enrollment could minimize subsequent drops and transfers from the academy.
- Continue your efforts to clarify with the EMO your individual needs to best meet the needs of “your” students.
- Continue your efforts to align your curriculum in order to provide the best instruction for your students.
- Regarding the MAP testing, continue to ask questions to help clarify how you can use the information to help improve teaching and learning at your academy.

In closing the team thanks everyone for your warm welcome. We appreciate your preparation and planning for our visit. The materials you provided helped us to better understand your programs and efforts. We appreciate your hospitality and the opportunity to be part of your family for a short time.

Sincerely,



Jim Scholten, Mid-Contract Review Team Chair

1. Governance *Domain: Leadership*

Points Possible 95	Points Achieved 88.75
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Competency	Score	Exceeding Standards	Meeting Standards	Does Not Meet Standards	Falls Far Below Standards	Reviewer Comments
Point distribution		n/a	15 points	9 points	0 points	
<p>Core Values: Foundation</p> <p>Stakeholders = Students, Board Members, Parents, Staff, Community at Large</p> <p>As evidenced by: Wall Charts, Websites, Newsletters, Board Meeting Minutes</p>	15/15		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In collaboration with the Academy's stakeholders, the Board has developed Core Values The Core Values are the foundation for the Academy's Vision and Mission statements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Board has identified some Core Values but there was little or no collaboration with the Academy's stakeholders The Core Values do not serve as the foundation for the Academy's Vision and Mission statements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Board has no discernible Core Values identified 	
Point distribution		n/a	10 points	6 points	0 points	
<p>Vision Statement: Linked to Core Values</p>	10/10		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In collaboration with stakeholders, the Board has developed a Vision Statement that articulates a realistic view of what it desires the Academy to become in the future The Vision Statement is clearly linked to the Academy's stated Core Values 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In minimal collaboration with stakeholders, the Board has developed a Vision Statement that articulates an unrealistic view of what it desires the Academy to become in the future The Vision Statement is not clearly linked to the Academy's stated Core Values 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Board has no discernible Vision Statement identified or is without links to the Core Values 	
<p>Mission: Linked to Core Values</p>	10/10		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In collaboration with stakeholders, the Board has developed a Mission Statement that articulates a realistic view of the Academy's identity and role The Mission Statement is clearly linked to the Academy's stated Core Values 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In minimal collaboration with stakeholders, the Board has developed a Mission Statement that articulates an unrealistic view of the Academy's identity and role The Mission Statement is not clearly linked to the Academy's stated Core Values 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Board has no discernible Mission Statement identified or is without links to the Core Values 	

Competency	Score	Exceeding Standards	Meeting Standards	Does Not Meet Standards	Falls Far Below Standards	Reviewer Comments
Point distribution		n/a	10 points	6 points	0 points	
Communication w/Stakeholders	10/10		The Board communicates the Mission, Vision, and Core Values to the Academy stakeholders in a wide variety of ways	The Board appears to do little to communicate the Mission, Vision, and Core Values to the Academy stakeholders or uses only limited ways to communicate	The Board does not appear to communicate the Mission, Vision, and Core Values to the Academy stakeholders	
Written Strategic Plan	10/10		The Board has a written strategic plan and there is evidence the Board regularly reviews this plan and refers to it when making long-term decisions	The Board has a written strategic plan; however, there is little evidence the Board reviews this plan or refer to it when making long-term decisions	The Board does not have a written strategic plan	
Point distribution		n/a	5 points	n/a	0 points	
Candidate Pool	5/5		The Board has an active candidate pool on file with the CSO		The Board does not have an active candidate pool on file with the CSO	All Boards receive 5 credits because of difficulty in identifying candidates
Management Company or Key School Leader (KSL) Evaluation	NA/NA		There is a correlation between the Board's annual evaluation(s) of the Management Company/KSL that reflects the Academy's academic achievement status and progress along with the provided business services		There does not seem to be a correlation between the Board's annual evaluation of Management Company/KSL and the Academy's academic achievement status and progress along with the provided business services	Not required this year
Professional Participation	5/5		The Board has a consistent representation at CSO-sponsored events		The Board has little or no representation at CSO-sponsored events	

Competency	Score	Exceeding Standards	Meeting Standards	Does Not Meet Standards	Falls Far Below Standards	Reviewer Comments
Point distribution		5 points	3.75 points	3 points	0 points	
Professional participation	5/5	The Board encourages and supports professional development activities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Includes funds in annual budget Each member is on schedule to meet their professional development activity credit requirement 	The Board encourages and supports professional development activities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Includes funds in annual budget Most members are on schedule to meet their professional development activity credit requirement 	There is little or no evidence that the Board encourages and supports professional development activities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does not include funds in annual budget Most members are not on schedule to meet their professional development activity credit requirement 	The Board does not engage in professional development	
Policies and Procedures As evidenced by: The Policies and Procedures Manual at the Board Meetings	5/5	The Board: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has all relevant policies/procedures in place in accordance with state and federal laws References appropriate policies/procedures at Board meetings when making decisions 	The Board: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has all relevant policies/procedures in place in accordance with state and federal laws Demonstrates familiarity with policies/procedures 	The Board: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has all relevant policies/procedures in place in accordance with state and federal laws Does not demonstrate familiarity with policies/procedures 	The Board: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has few policies/procedures in place that are required by state and federal laws Has not regularly updated its Policies and Procedures Manual 	
Meeting Schedule	3.75/5	The Board has not rescheduled any meetings during this review period	The Board has held no more than one rescheduled meeting during this review period	The Board has held 2-3 rescheduled meetings during this review period	The Board has held more than 3 rescheduled meetings during this review period	June 30, 2015
Monthly Quorums	0/5	The Board has not cancelled a meeting during this review period due to a lack of quorum	The Board has not cancelled more than one meeting during this review period due to lack of a quorum	The Board has cancelled 2-3 meetings during this review period due to lack of quorum	The Board has cancelled more than 3 meetings during this review period due to lack of quorum	May 15, 2013 January 15, 2014 April 16, 2014 February 18, 2015 May 20, 2015 August 19, 2015
Point distribution		n/a	10 points	6 points	0 points	
Physical Facilities	10/10		The physical facilities provided by the Board are always inviting, attractive, clean, well-maintained, and conducive to learning	The physical facilities provided by the Board are not always inviting, attractive, clean, well-maintained, and conducive to learning	The physical facilities provided by the Board are not inviting, attractive, clean, well-maintained, and conducive to learning	

Governance Domain: Leadership

Total score for all competencies

Total Points Achieved	88.75/95	Percentage Achieved	Category Achieved	
		93.42%	Exceeding Standards	

2. Governance *Domain: Financial Viability*

Points Possible 100	Points Achieved 90
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Competency	Score	Exceeding Standards	Meeting Standards	Does Not Meet Standards	Falls Far Below Standards	Reviewer Comments
Point distribution		n/a	15 points	9 points	0 points	
Budget development	15/15		As evidenced by Board minutes, the Board has established and adheres to a timeline for budget development	As evidenced by Board minutes, the Board has established a timeline for budget development but does not adhere to that timeline	As evidenced by Board minutes, the Board has not established a timeline for budget development	
Opportunity for input	15/15		Board meeting minutes document that the full Board had the opportunity to provide input into the budget development process two times or more prior to budget adoption	Board meeting minutes document that the full Board had the opportunity to provide input into the budget development process only once prior to budget adoption	No evidence can be found that the full Board had an opportunity to provide direction for the budget development process	
School improvement plan	15/15		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Academy's budget reflects and supports the school improvement plan with budget allotments for each strategy Budgeted amounts are consistent with the Board's overall strategic plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Academy's budget appears inconsistent with the school improvement plan Budgeted amounts are not consistent with the Board's overall strategic plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Academy's budget does not take school improvement into consideration Budgeted amounts are not consistent with the Board's overall strategic plan 	
Point distribution		n/a	10 points	6 points	0 points	
Access to monthly financial statements	10/10		Each member of the Board receives monthly financial statements as part of the agenda packet prior to each regularly scheduled Board meeting	Only the Board Treasurer receives monthly financial statements in his/her Board packet prior to each regularly scheduled meeting	Monthly financial statements are distributed "at the table"	
Point distribution		n/a	10 points	n/a	0 points	
Audit / fund balances: External audits	10/10		The Board requests RFPs for external auditing services no fewer than every three 3 years		The Board does not request RFPs for external auditing services every three 3 years	

Competency	Score	Exceeding Standards	Meeting Standards	Does Not Meet Standards	Falls Far Below Standards	Reviewer Comments
Point distribution		n/a	15 points	9 points	0 points	
Financial Audit submission	15/15		During this review period: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the Academy's audit was completed in a timely manner submitted to the State by or before October 31 results were shared with the Board of Directors in advance of the public presentation 	During this review period: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the Academy's audit was performed within the specified timeframe the Board of Directors did not receive it in advance of meeting for review 	During this review period: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the Academy's audit was not performed within the specified timeframe 	
Point distribution		n/a	10 points	n/a	0 points	
Financial Audit status	10/10		During this review period, the Board received only unqualified reports		During this review period, the Board received one or more qualified reports	
Point distribution		n/a	10 points	6 points	0 points	
Fund balance	0/10		The Board maintains a fund balance: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> between 10%-15% of annual revenue 	The Board maintains a fund balance: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> below 10% 	The Board maintains a fund balance: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> of less than 5% of general revenue 	

Governance Domain: Financial Viability						
Total score for all competencies						
Total Points Achieved	Score	Percentage Achieved	Category Achieved			
	90/100	90%	Meeting Standards			

3. Governance *Domain: Reporting*

Points Possible 100	Points Achieved 87.5
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Competency	Score	Exceeding Standards	Meeting Standards	Does Not Meet Standards	Falls Far Below Standards	Reviewer Comments
Point distribution		n/a	15 points	9 points	0 points	
Leadership: Monthly progress reports	15/15		As evidenced by Board minutes, the Board: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> receives detailed monthly reports on student achievement/progress toward contractual goals regularly engages in discussion about these reports 	As evidenced by Board minutes, the Board: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> periodically receives detailed monthly reports on student achievement/progress towards contractual goals occasionally engages in discussion about these reports 	As evidenced by Board minutes, the Board: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> does not receive detailed monthly reports on student achievement/progress towards contractual goals rarely discusses student academic achievement 	
Point distribution		n/a	15 points	n/a	0 points	
Administrator Continuing Education Unit (CEU) credits	15/15		All administrators meet CEU requirements		Not all administrators meet CEU requirements	
Point distribution		n/a	20 points	n/a	0 points	
Personnel Verification Audit: Compliance with State and Federal Law	20/20		During this review period the Academy maintained a Level 1 or 2 status of having all required personnel documentation current and on file or in timely process. Criminal Background Checks for all staff are on file. Some Unprofessional Conduct Checks may be pending. Some paraprofessionals may be pending Highly Qualified credentials		During this review period the Academy had significant Level 3 or 4 status of non-compliance issues with Michigan and Federal Law relating to Criminal Background Checks, Unprofessional Conduct Checks, and Certification/Licensure requirements	
Point distribution		n/a	10 points	7.5 points	0 points	
Compliance reporting Epicenter: On Time	7.5/10		All documents submitted to EPICENTER are marked "on time"	95-99% of all documents submitted to EPICENTER are marked "on time"	94% or fewer of all documents submitted to EPICENTER are marked "on time"	2012-2013 100% 2013-2014 100% 2014-2015 98%

Competency	Score	Exceeding Standards	Meeting Standards	Does Not Meet Standards	Falls Far Below Standards	Reviewer Comments
Point distribution		n/a	10 points	n/a	0 points	
Compliance reporting EPICENTER: Percent	0/10		The Academy meets the CSO percentage requirement for EPICENTER reporting		The Academy does not meet the CSO percentage requirement for EPICENTER reporting	
Compliance: Transparency Reporting	10/10		The Academy website meets MDE requirements for transparency reporting		The Academy website does not meet MDE requirements for transparency reporting	
Enrollment process	10/10		The Academy's enrollment process is in compliance as defined by the Revised School Code		The Academy's enrollment process is not in compliance as defined by the Revised School Code	
Board meetings: Notices of annual meetings	10/10		The Board posts timely notices of its annual meeting schedule and all regular and special meetings		The Board does not post timely notices of its annual meeting schedule and all regular and special meetings	

Governance Domain: Reporting				
Total score for all competencies				
Total Points Achieved	Score	Percentage Achieved	Category Achieved	
	87.5/100	87.5%	Meeting Standards	

4. School Culture/Facilities

Points Possible 95	Points Achieved 95
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Competency	Score	Exceeding Standards	Meeting Standards	Does Not Meet Standards	Falls Far Below Standards	Reviewer Comments
Point distribution		n/a	10 points	6 points	0 points	
Safe & orderly environment: Behavioral expectations and Student Discipline	10/10		Academy staff & the Board have developed behavioral expectations and implemented systems that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • create a safe and orderly academic environment • are conducive to learning 	Academy staff & the Board have developed behavioral expectations and implemented systems, however: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • they are not consistently enforced • the academic environment is not always conducive to learning 	Little or no evidence exists that the Academy & the Board: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • have developed behavioral expectations or systems that are consistently enforced • have established an academic environment that is conducive to learning 	
Safe & orderly environment: Safety plan	10/10		The Academy has: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a comprehensive safety plan in place and there is evidence that it is known by staff • implemented safety and security measures into daily operations 	The Academy has: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a comprehensive safety plan in place; however it does not seem to be known by staff • implemented some safety and security measures into daily operations 	The Academy: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • does not have a comprehensive safety plan in place • has not implemented safety and security measures into daily operations 	
Point distribution		n/a	10 points	n/a	0 points	
Site and facilities: Emergency systems	10/10		All emergency systems are operational, well-maintained, and inspected on a regular basis		There is little or no evidence that emergency systems are in working order inspected on a regular basis	
Point distribution		n/a	15 points	n/a	0 points	
Emergency Plan	15/15		There is a comprehensive emergency plan prepared for the Academy		There is no discernible emergency plan prepared for the Academy	
Point distribution		n/a	5 points	n/a	0 points	
Emergency Drill Logs (EMD)	NA/NA		The EMD shows the Academy is making good progress towards the requirements of law		The EMD shows the Academy is not making good progress towards the requirements of law	Waiver this year

Competency	Score	Exceeding Standards	Meeting Standards	Does Not Meet Standards	Falls Far Below Standards	Reviewer Comments
Point distribution		n/a	5 points	n/a	0 points	
Site and facilities: Hazardous materials	5/5		All hazardous chemicals and cleaners are properly labeled and safely secured		Hazardous chemicals and cleaners are not properly labeled or safely secured	
Site and facilities: HVAC system	5/5		All areas in the Academy are well ventilated and heated/cooled and are conducive to a positive working and learning environment		The Academy's ventilation and heating/cooling are not suitable for the positive working and learning environment	
Site and facilities: Restrooms and public areas	5/5		All restrooms and other public areas are well-maintained and clean.		All restrooms and other public areas are not well-maintained, clean, and are generally unsatisfactory	
Site and facilities: Lighting	5/5		All areas are well lit and all lights are functioning properly to provide an atmosphere conducive to teaching and learning		Not all areas are well lit and some lights are not functioning properly. Lighting is generally poor and not conducive to teaching and learning	
Point distribution		n/a	10 points	n/a	0 points	
Staff Stability: Administration	10/10		The Academy has had minimal building administrative turnover (2 or less) during the review period		The Academy has had significant administrative turnover (3 or more) during the review period	
Point distribution		n/a	15 points	n/a	0 points	
Staff Stability: Faculty	15/15		The Academy has had less than 40% turnover in teaching staff during the review period		The Academy has had more than 40% turnover in teaching staff during the review period	17.3% Teaching staff turnover since last review period
Point distribution		n/a	5 points	n/a	0 points	
Parent / family involvement and communication	5/5		The Academy employs a variety of strategies to promote and sustain engagement by students' parents / families		The Academy does not employ a variety of strategies to promote and sustain engagement by students' parents / families	

School Culture/Facilities:
Total score for all competencies

Total Points Achieved	95/95	Percentage Achieved	Category Achieved	
		100%	Meeting Standards	

5. School Improvement

Points Possible 60	Points Achieved 53.75
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Competency	Score	Exceeding Standards	Meeting Standards	Does Not Meet Standards	Falls Far Below Standards	Reviewer Comments
Point distribution		5 points	3.75 points	3 points	0 points	
<u>Standard 1:</u> Purpose and Direction (Teaching for Learning— Standards 1 &2)	3.75/5	The Academy has implemented most School Improvement Framework (SIF) rubrics to “Exemplary”(sustained) level (defined by MDE; documented in <i>Ed Yes!</i>)	The Academy has implemented most SIF rubrics to “Implemented”(full) level (defined by MDE; documented in <i>Ed Yes!</i>)	The Academy has implemented most SIF rubrics to “Partially Implemented”(partial) level (defined by MDE; documented in <i>Ed Yes!</i>)	The Academy has implemented most SIF rubrics to “Getting Started”(beginning) level (defined by MDE; documented in <i>Ed Yes!</i>)	
<u>Standard 2:</u> Governance and Leadership (Leadership for Learning)	3.75/5	The Academy has implemented most School Improvement Framework (SIF) rubrics to “Exemplary”(sustained) level (defined by MDE; documented in <i>Ed Yes!</i>)	The Academy has implemented most SIF rubrics to “Implemented”(full) level (defined by MDE; documented in <i>Ed Yes!</i>)	The Academy has implemented most SIF rubrics to “Partially Implemented”(partial) level (defined by MDE; documented in <i>Ed Yes!</i>)	The Academy has implemented most SIF rubrics to “Getting Started”(beginning) level (defined by MDE; documented in <i>Ed Yes!</i>)	
<u>Standard 3:</u> Teaching and Assessing for Learning (Professional Learning Culture)	3.75/5	The Academy has implemented most School Improvement Framework (SIF) rubrics to “Exemplary”(sustained) level (defined by MDE; documented in <i>Ed Yes!</i>)	The Academy has implemented most SIF rubrics to “Implemented”(full) level (defined by MDE; documented in <i>Ed Yes!</i>)	The Academy has implemented most SIF rubrics to “Partially Implemented”(partial) level (defined by MDE; documented in <i>Ed Yes!</i>)	The Academy has implemented most SIF rubrics to “Getting Started”(beginning) level (defined by MDE; documented in <i>Ed Yes!</i>)	
<u>Standard 4:</u> Resources and Support Systems (School, Family, & Community Relationships)	3.75/5	The Academy has implemented most School Improvement Framework (SIF) rubrics to “Exemplary”(sustained) level (defined by MDE; documented in <i>Ed Yes!</i>)	The Academy has implemented most SIF rubrics to “Implemented”(full) level (defined by MDE; documented in <i>Ed Yes!</i>)	The Academy has implemented most SIF rubrics to “Partially Implemented”(partial) level (defined by MDE; documented in <i>Ed Yes!</i>)	The Academy has implemented most SIF rubrics to “Getting Started”(beginning) level (defined by MDE; documented in <i>Ed Yes!</i>)	
<u>Standard 5:</u> Using Results for Continuous Improvement (Strand I, Standard 3)	3.75/5	The Academy has implemented most School Improvement Framework (SIF) rubrics to “Exemplary”(sustained) level (defined by MDE; documented in <i>Ed Yes!</i>)	The Academy has implemented most SIF rubrics to “Implemented”(full) level (defined by MDE; documented in <i>Ed Yes!</i>)	The Academy has implemented most SIF rubrics to “Partially Implemented”(partial) level (defined by MDE; documented in <i>Ed Yes!</i>)	The Academy has implemented most SIF rubrics to “Getting Started”(beginning) level (defined by MDE; documented in <i>Ed Yes!</i>)	

Competency	Score	Exceeding Standards	Meeting Standards	Does Not Meet Standards	Falls Far Below Standards	Reviewer Comments
Point distribution		n/a	10 points	n/a	0 points	
School Improvement Plan	10/10		The Academy maintains one annually-updated comprehensive written plan that encompasses all current educational mandates (such as PA 25, Title 1, NCLB, <i>Ed Yes!</i> , and other school-wide improvement efforts)		The Academy maintains a school improvement plan; however, it lacks some of the key components required by the state	
Point distribution		15 points	11.25 points	9 points	0 points	
Data Teams Process	15/15	The Academy has exemplary data team meetings regularly scheduled	The Academy has proficient data team meetings regularly scheduled	The Academy has data team meetings scheduled	The Academy has no data team meetings regularly scheduled	
Statewide Ranking	NA/NA	The Academy has been identified as a Reward School and is in the top 75 th percentile in the statewide Top to Bottom Ranking	The Academy is in the 50 th percentile or above in the statewide Top to Bottom Ranking	The Academy is in the 25 th to 49 th percentile in the statewide Top to Bottom Ranking	The Academy is identified as a Priority OR is ranked in the bottom quartile	
Point distribution		10 points	7.5 points	6 points	0 points	
School Improvement Goals and Educational Goals	10/10	All School Improvement Goals are directly connected to Academy Educational Goals	Most School Improvement Goals are directly connected to Academy Educational Goals	Few School Improvement Goals are directly connected to Academy Educational Goals	None of the School Improvement Goals are directly connected to Academy Educational Goals	

School Improvement:
Total score for all competencies

Total Points Achieved	53.75/60	Percentage Achieved	Category Achieved	
		89.58%	Meeting Standards	

BOARD INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Academy Name: **Michigan Connections Academy**

Date: **March 9-10, 2016**

The following is a summary of responses, and is not intended to be all-inclusive.

1. Do you feel the academy is accomplishing its mission? How do you know?

- Mission is promoted at every meeting – it comes out in every SIP discussion.
- Standard is high and continues to be improved.
- Administrator is great at using data to explain and promote ideas.
- We look at achievement results all the time – if there is a concern it is addressed.
- Encouraged that we're having an impressive impact on our unique population.

2. Are you confident that students are leaving this academy performing at a high level of academic achievement? Upon what evidence do you base your answer?

- Yes, we get lots of data on the kids regarding where the kids are at and what happens after graduation.
- We have a good track record of kids going on to higher education.
- In 2014, all graduates were going on to additional schooling.
- 16 out of 18 students are moving on to college and the last two are taking vocational classes.
- The majority move on to higher education.
- Attitude and culture contribute to this success.

3. Tell us about your knowledge of the charter school contract with FSU. What do you believe to be the most important information Board members should know?

- Good support with FSU field representatives – get lots of help and direction – good working relationship.
- Field representative, Lee Robinson is a good match for MICA.
- Constant support and open channel of communication with the CSO.
- FSU is very encouraging.
- Our goal is to exceed state average – we want to excel.

4. What are you most proud of at this academy? What could be improved?

• **Most Proud:**

- Very solid staff going that extra mile.
- Solid staff, leadership, quality of education, consistent growth, adaptation to student population (adapting to learning needs) through data collection.
- More teacher interaction/attention, achievement, extracurricular activities
- Our graduation rate has continued to grow.

• **Improvement:**

- Continual improvement sought for science and math.
- Controlling the size of the school – don't want to grow too fast.

5. Does your Board have a strategic plan for the next 3-5 years? If yes, what is the main focus of that plan? If no, do you see value in developing such a plan?

- Yes, the main focus of the plan is student achievement, budget, student growth, personalized curriculum and staff retention.
- Solid plan for student retention – communication plan is working.
- Teacher retention is important.
- We get a market report with trends and laws.
- Attracting younger students.

6. Why do you think parents choose to send their children to this academy?

- Connections is a well-kept secret – very proud of this academy.
- We have two solid target markets (1. Students doing well in traditional school and they can't grow. 2. Students that are struggling and traditional school doesn't have the means to help).
- Another target would be for students that need flexibility.

7. How does the Board determine the allocation of funds for this academy?

- We have a comprehensive budget that is dictated by cost.
- Most of the budget goes into staffing and constantly negotiating appropriate salary for good quality staff with long-term retention.

8. If money was not an object, what changes would you like to see made to the academy? (Example: building, curriculum staffing, etc.)

- Staff wages, increased salaries.
- More professional development for staff if necessary.

9. Anything for our attention?

- For the Board, operating from a distance. A quorum is sometimes hard or a challenge because of the distance (state wide board and drive time is around 150 miles), weather, and job commitments – creative flexibility would be appreciated (“Virtual Meetings”).

ADMINISTRATIVE INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Academy Name: **Michigan Connections Academy**

Date: **March 9-10, 2016**

The following is a summary of responses, and is not intended to be all-inclusive.

1. Do you feel the academy is accomplishing its mission? How do you know?

- I do, we are aligned to our mission – online education is still new and we are learning.
- We are perfecting and are able to personalize each students learning – teachers are allowed to teach.
- Yes, the culture is collaborative. We have more engagement and teacher retention.
- Knowing where we are and where we're going.
- Everything we do is designed to maximize potential and to meet performance standards.
- We are adhering to the needs of students and school goals.

2. What are you most proud of at this academy? What could be improved?

- **Most Proud:**
 - Culture of learning is continuous – we've been able to grow and gain status in the State of Michigan because of achievement.
 - Families who stay with us.
 - Accountability system in place – our people lead and create improvement.
 - Collaboration and shared leadership.
 - We have a healthy relationship with ESP, because they make good decisions for the school.
- **Improved:**
 - Need to understand MAP better.
 - How to do better in math
 - Educating the public about what we are.
 - We need to fine tune what we are doing.

3. Are you confident that students are leaving this academy performing at a high level of academic achievement? Upon what evidence do you base your answer?

- Yes, whether it's graduation or support in a certain area, kids are far more prepared (need to be self-motivated, communicate with adults, advocate for themselves).

- Every year students continue to show growth (cohort kids).
- Have gained credibility with universities.

4. On a scale of 1-10 (10 Highest), rate the culture/climate of this academy.

- 9-10 – This is what we work for.
- 9.9 – Forefront since inception – that’s what makes this place special.
- 9.9 – Hallmark set by Bryan.

5. What are the biggest thing(s) you and your staff struggle with on a day-to-day basis?

- ESP oversight – sometimes they “over-reach” and interferes with operational ideas – the company is out-of-state.
- On a day-to-day basis, just look at what needs to be tweaked and make it better.
- Parent engagement for a small group of students.
- Getting students to reach goals.

6. What are the top TWO things this academy needs to do for its long-term health and longevity?

- Being mindful of legislative practices relating to online learning.
- Continual development of system to ensure achievement and success.

7. Why do you think parents choose to send their children to this academy?

- Many different reasons; bad experiences with previous school, terminally ill, kids needing to be challenged, etc.
- Marketing – radio, television, online/virtual open house, kindergarten roundup, etc.

INSTRUCTIONAL STAFF INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Academy Name: **Michigan Connections Academy**

Date: **March 9-10, 2016**

The following is a summary of responses, and is not intended to be all-inclusive.

1. Do you feel the academy is accomplishing its mission? How do you know?

- Yes, we spend a lot of time on culture, always pushing people further. Everyone is here because they want to be here – it's all about our students and their success.
- Continual alignment and rigor.
- We are able to provide a lot of one-on-one time with students.
- We work hard to align our curriculum to best meet needs of students.
- Our biweekly calls really help us to keep track of each student.

2. What are you most proud of at this academy? What could be improved?

- **Most Proud:**
 - Strong PLC support system is working very well, there is a lot of collaboration.
- **Improvement:**
 - Some curriculum is not aligned with standards – working on to improve.
 - The learning platform could be improved.
 - Curriculum alignment – working with the ESP (Connexus) – across the board, however, we are grateful it is updated regularly.
 - Connexus learning platform isn't user friendly – course modifications and lack of streamlining.

3. On a scale of 1-10 (10 Highest), tell us your feelings about the level of support you receive for each of the following areas:

a. Materials and Supplies

- 10 – all

b. Professional Training

- 10 – all

c. Clear Description and Understanding of The Expectations For Your Work

- 10 – all

4. On a scale of 1-10 (10 Highest), rate the culture/climate of this academy.

- 10 – all
- It is very good.
- Bryan always shares accomplishments with staff.
- The culture/climate is supportive, collaborative, open door flexible and really caring.
- Bryan Klochack uses the term “you”, not “I” when acknowledging school success.

5. Do you feel the academic expectations here are appropriate for the students who attend this academy?

- Yes, expectation are high.
- The students are expected to do all the work and there is a lot of support.
- Here students are expected to learn without cutting corners.

6. Would you enroll your child at this academy?

- Yes, but it won't meet our needs, because one parent needs to be home.

7. If money was not an object, what changes would you like to see made to the academy (Example: building, curriculum, staffing, etc).

- A bigger building for an individual to record video (video area or studio).
- Stand-up work stations.

8. Anything for our attention?

- For FSU to help teachers to feel comfortable in front of camera to record lessons.

SUPPORT STAFF INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Academy Name: **Michigan Connections Academy**

Date: **March 9-10, 2016**

The following is a summary of responses, and is not intended to be all-inclusive.

1. Do you feel the academy is accomplishing its mission? How do you know?

- Accomplishing the best that we can.
- Teachers are challenging students – many stay after hours to help.
- Collaboration and communication allows for student success.
- Teachers adapt to what is in the best interest of the student.
- There is a lot of communication between teachers and the teachers' students.
- The mission is published in many places throughout the virtual academy (on the website, on walls, in message board, newsletters, etc.).

2. What are you most proud of at this academy? What could be improved?

- **Most Proud:**
 - Not interested in first effort, but in best effort.
 - Everyone's effort and ability to work as a team – all feel free to ask for help.
 - Our AD team promotes this – shared leadership – everyone's role is important – all understand that if one part is broken, the rest won't function.
 - We feel appreciated and that our work is valued – it is a place to safely ask questions and to state ideas.
- **Improved:**
 - Not really improved, but we look to grow
 - Everyone listens and is supportive.
 - Find what works best, utilize talents, some are learning curves – finding one area and improving upon it.

3. On a scale of 1-10 (10 Highest), tell us your feelings about the level of support you receive for each of the following areas:

a. Materials and Supplies

- 10 – all

b. Professional Training

- 10 – all

c. Clear Description and Understanding of The Expectations For Your Work

- 10 – all

4. On a scale of 1-10 (10 Highest), rate the culture/climate of this academy.

- 10 – Very comfortable, family atmosphere.

5. Do you feel the academic expectations here are appropriate for the students who attend this academy?

- I do – during enrollment calls we educate the parents that we have high expectations.
- Some families may think they can log-in and disappear – that is not the case. Students are challenged and their needs are to be addressed or they will not succeed.
- I was surprised about the number of students doing so well and going on to a four year college – word of mouth is spreading the success.

6. Would you enroll your child at this academy?

- This has to be the best fit – for some of my kids or relatives it may work well and some it may not.
- I'm thinking about it. I don't have children now – may be a logistic concern.
- It has to be the right fit for the right child (dual enrollment, Title program, gifted and talented, electives, etc.).

7. If money was not an object, what changes would you like to see made to the academy (Example: building, curriculum, staffing, etc).

- Bigger building for more space – daycare space for teachers' children (supervised classroom).

8. Anything for our attention?

- Feeling like you are appreciated and that your time matters.
- You're acknowledged and you appreciate the support.
- Opportunities for students who need another option (social, academic, issues, etc.)
- We have provided a life change for many students and have a variety of ways to help kids learn.
- For some it is the difference between a diploma and a GED.
- Knowing and seeing kids succeed.
- Several different ways to teach and reach a larger group of kids.

PARENT INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Academy Name: **Michigan Connections Academy**

Date: **March 9-10, 2016**

The following is a summary of responses, and is not intended to be all-inclusive.

- 1. Why did you choose to have your child(ren) attend this academy? On a scale of 1-10 (10 highest), how satisfied are you with that choice?**
 - 10 – We chose MICA vs. other virtual/online schools due to the curriculum.
 - 10 – We switched from homeschool, because of the curriculum.
 - 9-10 – My oldest son has dyslexia and my other son has food allergies, I did some research and found MICA and looked to see how their students were doing, and I saw that the students there were doing really well so we decided to switch.
- 2. How responsive is the school administration, board, or teachers to concerns or complaints?**
 - Extremely responsive – someone always responds within three hours – most times they respond immediately.
 - Teachers are excited to be here and they love their jobs.
- 3. On a scale of 1-10 (10 highest), rate the culture/climate of this academy. Please tell us why you gave the rating you did.**
 - At least a 9.
 - 9-10 – culture of staff, live lessons, field trips, and everything feels warm and inviting.
 - Teachers go out of their way to make a pleasant experience.
- 4. Are you satisfied that your child is learning to their full potential at this academy? Please tell us why you feel the way you do.**
 - My oldest son was ignored in public school so we switched to MICA. He started MICA in the 5th grade with a 2nd-3rd grade level, and now he is on grade level. He is now excited to learn and can describe what's happening daily.
 - My kids know what they are learning, what they are doing, and what they will be doing next.
 - Some 8th graders are taking high school classes.
- 5. What is the number one complaint your child has about attending school here?**
 - Portfolio's – hands on projects, educational technology lessons (updates on Connexus), etc.

- Sometimes the number of live lessons is extreme, and they sometimes have to watch a video prior to the live lesson.
- Discovery Education videos, too difficult and they sometimes do not work well.
- Sometimes technological learning class is not necessary and there should be a way to opt out – maybe too much now.

6. *What is the number one thing your child really seems to enjoy?*

- Literature studies, my daughter really enjoys.
- Art is my child's favorite class – loves all aspects (i.e. art history and techniques).
- Really likes the history class, because it is more in depth than traditional school and is able to have a good conversation with the teacher one-on-one.
- Can do school any time of day – can move about – flexibility.
- Teenagers can sleep in.
- Not distracted from other kids.
- No competition of clothes.
- No drama getting technical skills and communication skills.
- Gaining independence – kids can guide themselves through.

7. *Tell us about the level of communication you receive from this academy? Is it adequate? Do you understand what is being communicated?*

- Communication is always open, talk regularly with teachers (at least once a month).
- MICA is very responsive to any needs, questions or concerns. They provided the parents orientation and learning couch guides.

8. *Anything for our attention?*

- Future skills MICA students are learning – technology skills, communication, video live lessons, independence, and self-discipline.
- They know how to articulate their goals and what direction they need to go in.
- New textbooks online are not efficient – need 6th and 7th grade science books.

STUDENT INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Academy Name: **Michigan Connections Academy**

Date: **March 9-10, 2016**

The following is a summary of responses, and is not intended to be all-inclusive.

1. Do you enjoying attending this school? If you had a choice to attend anywhere else, would you?

- I would not attend anywhere else.
- I like the teachers and the flexibility – time management.
- I don't feel we are missing anything.
- We get to do extracurricular through the community.
- Time management – you can schedule your own day.

2. Do you feel you are learning at this school? Are you being challenged enough, too much, or at just the right amount?

- Yes, we're learning at the right level.
- I am getting the help I need.
- There is a lot more resources and I like the variety.
- It is just right.
- There are more resources, not just textbooks.

3. Do you feel that overall, the adults here at this school are fair to students?

- Yes, they're always caring.
- They take time to address student needs.
- If I ask a question, the teachers talk it through with us.
- The teachers here are much more willing to allow you to redo/retest and fix things.
- When we asked a question in a traditional school we were re-directed to the book, whereas here they listen.
- They will give you extra time to complete assignments.

4. What is your favorite part of the school day? Why?

- I like the live lessons like history and science because they go more into depth.
- I like the literature class because there is a lot of opportunity to read more.
- I like the math class because I can work at my own pace.

5. *Is there anything (classes, activities, etc) you wished this school offered that they do not currently offer?*

- A sports program – some can participate with traditional schools.
- Computer coding – some more advances computer skills. We wish we didn't have education technology because it is more teaching to writing and it is repetitive from last year.

6. *Would you recommend this school to other friends or family?*

- Yes, I already have.
- MICA gives the right amount of work.
- Flexibility, if you're involved with extracurricular activities.
- The content is more in-depth.
- There is not as much distractions as there is in a classroom.
- Teachers care about us.

7. *Anything for our attention?*

- For 6th and 7th grade I didn't have a paper science book and the online book version was not very good.
- The 8th grade online books are PDFs that only open one page at a time and are hard to use.
- The 10th grade history book doesn't work well.

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT TEAM SUMMARY

Academy Name: **Michigan Connections Academy**

Date: **March 9-10, 2016**

- 1. *What strategies and/or programs that you have implemented are the most effective and/or promising at this time? (What are you most proud of?) How were they selected? How do you know they are effective?***
 - Currently completing SIP review and many members are new/new teachers, yet a good representative mix.
 - Truancy problems have been improved this year with an alarm system.
 - Writing consultant to improve writing process (development of rubrics and vertical alignment) being implemented throughout the curriculum.
 - Initiative from the beginning of the year are biweekly calls for K-12 grades. The students have shown great improvements in math, science and social studies.
 - Transitions to middle school and high school have improved.

- 2. *What strategies and/or programs are in need of immediate attention in order to be effective?***
 - Support in high school language arts (written skills is a concern) – the population is needier.
 - Need to develop a learning coach program for parents, if parent's computer skills are good, the kids do much better.
 - In need of math intervention and math consultants.

- 3. *What is the most important goal you have set for your students? Why?***
 - We want to help each individual student to find success and their ultimate level of success – this may relate to different SIP goals because each person's plan looks different.

- 4. *Do students know the achievement goals that have been set? How do they track their individual progress toward those goals? Have you met any of your goals?***
 - Going to conferences to help students learn to know what are their goals are and what and how they will get there.
 - The students know what their grades are and how to self-reflect in order to get goals and guide their achievement.
 - NWEA is so new we can't really say what the long range goals are.
 - Lower EL students have a goal sheet. The students e-mail their goals and make adjustments as necessary to their short-term goals.

5. What measures/assessments will you be using to determine if you are making progress toward the goals identified in the SIP?

- MAP – Determining how to effectively utilize their data.
- Doing a lot of content and curriculum alignment (student mastery).
- Goal is to not have teachers have higher than 10% failure rate.
- Not just using MAP, we are also using goal sheets, long range goals, and other assessments.
- Decisions are made only through verification of other measures.
- Parents and students know what is expected.
- Universal screenings, diagnostic tests, common assessments (pre and post), and standards based assessment design.
- PLC's and data teams.

6. What are the biggest challenges that you will be facing over the next three (3) years?

- Implementing “Visible Learning”.
- Working through the multi-tier systems and perfecting them.
- Cementing in the holes with current system – MTTTS, Title 1– we are striving every day to remain active and avoid complacency

7. In your opinion are your recommendations for improvement considered appropriately and are they supported?

- Yes, we can always bring up concerns.
- We feel like we are listened to and they are very open to suggesting change.

8. What is really different since our last visit? November 2012?

- We've grown.
- We know what we're doing now.
- Trust and belief in what we're doing for students.
- Excellent culture, open lines of communication and a strong culture.
- Continuous learning and development.
- Moving as a team – more familiarity and knowledge of content and school protocols.
- We have a very strong collaboration.

9. Is there anything you would like to add that has not been addressed? How can Ferris State University help/support you with your goals?

- Continued support to improve math program.
- Could use some help with science program.
- Need help with the math curriculum and other support.

MID-CONTRACT SELF-PERFORMANCE REPORT SCORING RUBRIC

	Did Not Answer 0 points	Somewhat Answered 2.5 points	Answered 4 points	Outstandingly Answered 5 points	
<p>1. Is the academy making academic progress relative to its contractual goals?</p> <p>Discuss Full Academic Year versus Non-Full Academic Year student achievement as it relates to MEAP and provide rationale for any notable trends.</p> <p>Discuss Cohort versus Non-Cohort student achievement as it relates to GlobalScholar Performance Series and provide rationale for any notable trends.</p> <p style="color: red; margin-top: 20px;">Total Possible Points=5</p>				X	A C A D E M I C P R O G R A M
<p><i>What reviewers will look for:</i></p> <p>In all cases, claims must be backed by clear and quantitative evidence. What has the trend for student achievement been during the current contract period? Have gains outweighed any lack of progress? Have any specific weaknesses been identified? How have those weaknesses been addressed? Include discussion of the progress cohorts (students who have been with the Academy for three or more years) have made over time. Discussion of the continuous updating of curriculum materials, objectives, and School Improvement Plans should be included.</p> <p><i>Reviewer Comments:</i></p>					

2. Outline the process all stakeholders within the Academy utilize to develop both long-and short-term strategic planning.	Did Not Answer 0 points	Somewhat Answered 2.5 points	Answered 4 points	Outstandingly Answered 5 points	S T R A T E G I C P L A N N I N G	
				X		
<p>What reviewers will look for:</p> <p>The Academy provides evidence that all stakeholders (teachers, parents, students, staff, and board members) have input into the process. Is there a specific time of year that strategic planning occurs? How is the process communicated to stakeholders? Once the strategic planning is complete, where is the Academy’s Strategic Plan housed? How often is the Strategic Plan reviewed and updated? How does the board ensure that it is appropriating resources to fulfill the stated Strategic Plan?</p> <p>Reviewer Comments:</p>						

Total Possible Points=5

3. Describe the Academy's process for determining and carrying out professional development for faculty and staff.	Did Not Answer 0 points	Somewhat Answered 2.5 points	Answered 4 points	Outstandingly Answered 5 points.	P R O F E S S I O N A L D E V E L O P M E N T	
<p>Total Possible Points=5</p>				X		
	<p>What reviewers will look for:</p> <p>How is professional development determined? How is classroom application monitored? Are topics revisited for reinforcement? Is it adequately funded? During the review period, how many new initiatives have been instituted and monitored? Professional development calendars, presenters, and staff check-in/check-out sheets may also be used as evidence of quality professional development practices.</p> <p>Reviewer Comments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Calendar and timetable presented at review is supplemental materials. 					

4. Describe how the Academy has established a safe and orderly environment that is conducive to student learning and high academic expectations.	Did Not Answer 0 points	Somewhat Answered 2.5 points	Answered 4 points	Outstandingly Answered 5 points	S C H O O L C U L T U R E	
				X		
<p>What reviewers will look for:</p> <p>Evidence that all staff members share the responsibility in caring for student discipline on a daily basis. Do adults model the behavior they insist upon from the students? How does the Academy share its behavior expectations with staff, students, and parents? What behavioral programs have been implemented at the Academy (Character Education, Love and Logic, RTC, etc.)?</p> <p>Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>Total Possible Points=5</p>						

5. As the Academy approaches reauthorization, what are the biggest challenges it faces? How does the Academy intend to address these challenges?	Did Not Answer 0 points	Somewhat Answered 2 points	Answered 3.5 points	Outstandingly Answered 5 points	C H A L L E N G E S / O P P O R T U N I T E S
<p>Total Possible Points=5</p>			X		
	<p>What reviewers will look for:</p> <p>There will be narrative that shows long-range planning to address challenges facing the Academy. As much as possible, resources should be identified along with a timetable for implementation. Identify how the challenges have been incorporated into the School Improvement Plan, how the plan will be monitored, and by whom.</p> <p>Reviewer Comments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The application answer did not address how the resources would be identified with timetable for implementation. Also, there was not discussion of incorporation into the SIP and how it will be monitored and by whom. 				

**Mid-Contract Self-Performance
Tally Sheet**

Question	Points Possible	Points Awarded
1	5	5.0
2	5	5.0
3	5	5.0
4	5	5.0
5	5	3.5
Total Points		23.5/25

Michigan Connections Academy Mid-Contract Self Report

Please provide answers to the following questions:

Academic Program (5 Points)

- *Is the Academy making academic progress relative to its contractual goals?*
- *Discuss Full Academic Year versus Non-Full Academic Year student achievement as it relates to M-Step and provide rationale for any notable trends.*
- *Discuss Cohort versus Non-Cohort student achievement as it relates to Scantron Performance Series and provide rationale for any notable trends.*

What reviewers will look for:

In all cases, claims must be backed by clear and quantitative evidence. What has the trend for student achievement been during the current contract period? Have gains outweighed any lack of progress? Have any specific weaknesses been identified? How have those weaknesses been addressed? Include discussion of the progress cohorts (students who have been with the Academy for three or more years) have made over time. Discussion of the continuous updating of curriculum materials, objectives, and School Improvement Plans should be included.

MICA has made excellent progress relative to the contractual goals with Ferris State. Those goals are included below, followed by a summary of academic progress across all areas. MICA continues to demonstrate trends of increased student achievement across all content areas with high levels of accountability and expectation for all stakeholders. Areas of noted weakness for us are in the areas of writing and math, which we are addressing through ongoing, job-embedded professional development activities and a solid Response to Intervention system. We continue to see students who are with MICA for 3 or more years demonstrating general overall achievement levels at or above state averages. MICA staff revisit and update at least annually the School Improvement Plans as well as curriculum alignment to content expectations, and disaggregate all testing data to determine possible curricular and pedagogical gaps.

At MICA, our most significant area of weakness has been in writing at all grade levels and in all content areas and in math. Our School and District Improvement plans are designed to improve student achievement in all four core academic areas with specific attention to our identified weaknesses and outline specific ways to address those weaknesses and achieving our contractual educational goals.

Our planned methods for improving our writing and math scores include (but are not limited to):

1. Reduction in class size by hiring teaching staff.
2. Additional and more immediate interventions for all content areas

Michigan Connections Academy Mid-Contract Self Report

3. Providing additional "Tier II and Tier III" interventions in the form of additional Title I services provided to struggling students at that grade level.
4. Concentrated Professional Development on improvement of teaching techniques and methodologies through Professional Learning Community (PLC) initiatives. The PLC concept has been developed and evolved over a period of years; its focus is on student learning. MICA's Professional Learning Community is a group of educators committed to working collaboratively in ongoing processes of inquiry and action research to achieve increased results for their students. Significant time will be dedicated to this work in this area throughout the school year.
5. Concentrated on-going, job-embedded professional development for all teaching staff to improve writing techniques and pedagogy provided by professional writing consultants who conducted on-site professional development.
6. Restructuring of LiveLesson opportunities and schedules to provide directed instruction in noted weak areas. More specifically, directed, targeted writing LiveLessons at each grade level.

Connections Education, the educational services provider for Michigan Connections Academy (MICA), formally redevelops its curriculum on a 6-year cycle. However, daily maintenance occurs as needed within this six year cycle, based on feedback from students, parents, teachers, and other stakeholders. Annual revisions are made based on customer feedback, state standards, iNACOL (International Association for K-12 Online Learning) standards, and internal assessment analyses. **Attachment 1, "2012-2013 Curriculum Memo," Attachment 2, "2013-2014 Curriculum Memo," and Attachment 3, "2014-2015 Curriculum Memo"** provide extensive information about improvements made to the curriculum since the 2012-2013 school year. These memos are provided to the school board each spring. The full Connections curricular offerings are presented in the [Connections Education Program Guide](#), available online. School Improvement plans for 2012-13, 2013-2014, and 2014-2015 will be available at the on-site visit.

The following is a brief summary of MICA's progress toward FSU school goals with regard to state and district testing. All blue text is from FSU, black text is MICA's response.

Measure for Determining Goal Achievement

To determine whether the Academy is demonstrating measurable progress in preparing all students academically for success in college, work and life, Ferris State University will assess the Academy's performance using the following measures of student growth and achievement. The Academy will properly administer the tests detailed under each of the following metrics in accordance with the time frames identified in the Academy's Master Calendar of Reporting Requirements. Each year, within 30 days after receiving the student test results from the fall testing window, the Academy and Ferris State University will consult to establish the baseline and specify the academic growth the Academy needs to make with students to help them reach the college readiness achievement targets identified in Appendix A.

Michigan Connections Academy Mid-Contract Self Report

Measure 1 and Measure 2: Student Growth and Student Achievement

Improved academic achievement for all groups of students in grades 2-12 will be assessed using the following metrics and growth targets:

Grade(s)	Metric	Growth Targets	Results Summary
Grades 2-8	Growth made by students from fall-to-spring in reading and math as measured by scaled scores on the Performance Series by GlobalScholar [®] .	Students' academic growth will demonstrate, on average, quantifiable academic progress as specified in Item C in the policy towards the grade-level reading and math college readiness achievement targets identified in Appendix A	<p>As can be seen from the Scantron summary documents below from 2012-2015, MICA has found success in each of the 3 years when measured against FSU standards for that particular year. Although the measures may have changed, the undeniable expectation by FSU of student growth throughout the year as measured by Scantron has occurred in each of the years.</p> <p>MICA students who tested both in the Fall and Spring during the '12 – '13 school year exceeded the FSU Student Achievement and Expected Growth expectation in all three categories: Reading, Math and LA.</p> <p>During the '13 – '14 school year, MICA students who tested both in the Fall and the Spring showed Growth in 7 / 7 grades assessed and exceeded the established goal in 7 / 7 grades assessed in LA. For Math, MICA students showed growth in 7 / 7 grades assessed and exceeded the established goal in 5 / 7 grades.</p> <p>During the '14 – '15 school year, MICA students who tested both in the Fall and the Spring showed Growth in 7 / 7 grades assessed and exceeded the established goal in 7 / 7 grades assessed in LA. For Math, MICA students showed growth in 7 / 7 grades assessed and exceeded the established</p>

Michigan Connections Academy Mid-Contract Self Report

<p>Grades 8-12</p>	<p>Growth made by students in reading, math, science, and English as measured by subject scores on the EXPLORE, PLAN and ACT tests.</p>	<p>Students' academic growth between tests, on average, will demonstrate quantifiable academic progress as specified in Item C in the policy toward the grade-level reading, math, science and English college readiness achievement targets identified in Appendix A</p>	<p>goal in 3 / 7 grades.</p> <p>While MICA students' academic growth between tests demonstrated quantifiable academic progress, it did not meet the level of academic progress as specified in all disciplines as defined.</p> <p>When looking at the '13 – '14 school year, ACTExplore to ACTPlan, MICA students' met the CCR target in 2 of the 4 disciplines. In the other two areas MICA students did meet the 70% expected growth goal and in so doing, met the expectations in all 4 areas.</p> <p>When looking at the '13 – '14 school year, ACTPlan to ACT, MICA students' met the CCR target in 1 of the 4 disciplines. In the other three areas MICA students did meet the 70% expected growth goal in 1 area but did not meet, although growth occurred, the expected 70% in the other 2 areas and in so doing, met the expectations in 2 areas.</p> <p>When looking at the '14 – '15 school year, ACTExplore to ACTPlan, MICA students' met the CCR target in 2 of the 4 disciplines. In the other two areas MICA students did not meet, although growth occurred, the 70% expected growth goal and in so doing, did not meet the expectations in 2 of the areas.</p> <p>When looking at the '14 – '15 school year, ACTPlan to ACT, MICA students' met the CCR target in 1 of the 4 disciplines. In the other three areas MICA students did meet the 70% expected growth goal in 1 area but did not meet, although growth occurred, the expected 70% in the other 2 areas and in so doing,</p>
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Michigan Connections Academy Mid-Contract Self Report

			met the expectations in 2 areas.
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The academic achievement of all students in grades 2-12, who have been enrolled for three or more years at the Academy, will be assessed using the following metrics and achievement targets:

Grade(s)	Metric	Achievement Targets	Results Summary
Grades 2-7	The average college readiness level based on scaled scores from the Performance Series by GlobalScholar [®] reading and math tests administered in the spring.	Students enrolled for three or more years will, on average, achieve scaled scores equal to or greater than the grade-level reading and math college readiness achievement targets identified in Appendix A.	<p>As can be seen from the Scantron summary documents below from 2012-2015, MICA has found success in each of the 3 years when measured against FSU standards for that particular year. Although the measures may have changed, the undeniable expectation by FSU of student growth throughout the year as measured by Scantron has occurred in each of the years.</p> <p>MICA students who tested both in the Fall and Spring during the '12 – '13 school year exceeded the FSU Student Achievement and Expected Growth expectation in all three categories: Reading, Math and LA.</p> <p>During the '13 – '14 school year, MICA students who tested both in the Fall and the Spring showed Growth in 7 / 7 grades assessed and exceeded the established goal in 7 / 7 grades assessed in LA. For Math, MICA students showed growth in 7 / 7 grades assessed and exceeded the established goal in 5 / 7 grades.</p> <p>During the '14 – '15 school year, MICA students who tested both in the Fall and the Spring showed Growth in 7 / 7 grades assessed and exceeded the established goal in 7 / 7 grades assessed in LA. For Math, MICA students showed growth in 7 / 7 grades assessed and exceeded the established goal in 3 / 7 grades.</p>

Michigan Connections Academy Mid-Contract Self Report

<p>Grades 8-12</p>	<p>The average college readiness level based on subject scores from the EXPLORE[®], PLAN[®] and ACT[®] tests by ACT, Inc. administered in the spring.</p>	<p>Students enrolled for three or more years will, on average, achieve EXPLORE, PLAN and ACT subject scores equal to or greater than the grade-level reading, math, science and English college readiness achievement targets identified in Appendix A .</p>	<p>While MICA students' academic growth between tests demonstrated quantifiable academic progress, it did not meet the level of academic progress as specified in all disciplines as defined.</p> <p>When looking at the '13 – '14 school year, ACTExplore to ACTPlan, MICA students' met the CCR target in 2 of the 4 disciplines. In the other two areas MICA students did not meet, although there was growth, the 70% expected growth goal and in so doing, did not meet the expectations in 2 of the 4 areas.</p> <p>When looking at the '13 – '14 school year, ACTPlan to ACT, MICA students' met the CCR target in 2 of the 4 disciplines. In the other two areas MICA students did not meet, although there was growth, the 70% expected growth goal and in so doing, met the expectations in 2 of the 4 areas.</p> <p>When looking at the '14 – '15 school year, ACTExplore to ACTPlan, MICA students' met the CCR target in 2 of the 4 disciplines. In the other two areas MICA students did not meet, although growth occurred, the 70% expected growth goal and in so doing, met the expectations 2 of the areas.</p> <p>When looking at the '14 – '15 school year, ACTPlan to ACT, MICA students' met the CCR target in 2 of the 4 disciplines. In the other two areas MICA students did not meet, although growth occurred, the expected 70% expected growth in the other 2 areas and in so doing, met the expectations in 2 areas.</p>
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Measure 3: Student Achievement-Relative Performance and State/Federal

Accountability The academic achievement of Full Academic Year Students will be assessed using the following metrics and achievement targets:

Michigan Connections Academy Mid-Contract Self Report

Grade(s)	Metric	Achievement Targets	Results Summary
Grades 3-9	Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP)	On average, the Academy will score equal to or greater than the performance of its Composite Resident District in reading and math.	For the '12 – '13 school year, MICA students' eclipsed the performance of their Composite Resident District in 5 of the 6 grade levels and for the '13 – '14 school year, MICA students' eclipsed in 6 of the 6 grade levels in Reading. For the '12 – '13 school year in Math, MICA students' eclipsed the performance of their Composite Resident District in 4 of the 6 grade levels and for the '13 – '14 school year, MICA students' eclipsed in 2 of the 6 grade levels.
Grade 11	Michigan Merit Examination (MME)		For the '12 – '13 school year, MICA students' eclipsed the performance of their Composite Resident District in both Reading and Math and for the '13 – '14 school year MICA students' eclipsed their Composite Resident District in Reading.

Michigan Connections Academy Mid-Contract Self Report

Grades 3-9 and 11	State Accountability Scorecard/MEAP	In order to assure that academies authorized by FSU meet the requirements of the state accreditation system, the Academy will (achieve/sustain) a 70% (Green Status) or higher.	In the years applicable for State Accountability Scorecards, MICA earned a score of 80% in the '13 – '14 school year and a 70% score in the '14 – '15 school year as MICA earned a color of "yellow" both years. MICA was excited at their overall performance as it should be noted that the '13 – '14 school year saw a significant enrollment (117%) which impacted state assessment data in '14 – '15.
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MICA LEAP Results 2012-2013 through 2014-2015 School Years

MICA students in grades K-2 participate in LEAP (Longitudinal Evaluation of Academic Progress) testing for pre- and post-test measures. LEAP is a (proprietary) psychometrically valid benchmark assessment system developed by Connections Education and used in elementary and middle School in reading and math across the country. Students receive a score of percent correct on the pretest and posttest LEAP reading and math assessments. Students are considered to have made satisfactory progress if they score a minimum of 75% on the posttest assessment and/or if they increase their score from the pretest to the posttest by at least 10 percentage points. LEAP results are presented below. Results below are based on students that completed both the pretest and posttest for a given year.

Grade	2012-2013			2013-2014			2014-2015		
	Average Math Pretest Score	Average Math Posttest Score	% with Satisfactory Progress	Average Math Pretest Score	Average Math Posttest Score	% with Satisfactory Progress	Average Math Pretest Score	Average Math Posttest Score	% with Satisfactory Progress
K	85.8%	96.0%	100.0%	84.7%	96.3%	98.0%	79.1%	97.1%	100.0%
1	79.6%	90.3%	93.1%	67.1%	90.1%	100.0%	73.4%	90.2%	95.4%

MICA Scantron Results 2012-2013 through 2014-2015 School Years

Fall 2012



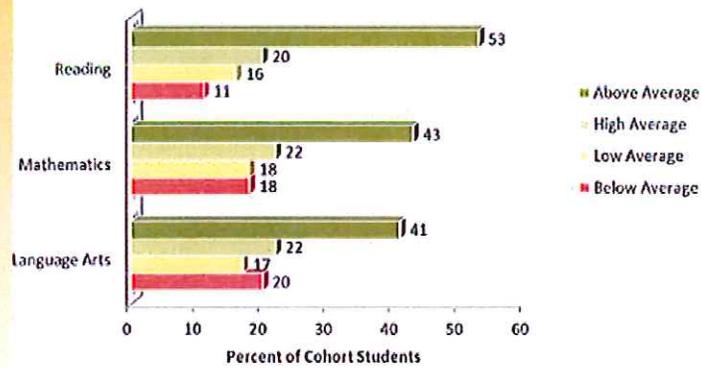
Ferris State University Charter Schools Office

Michigan Connections Academy

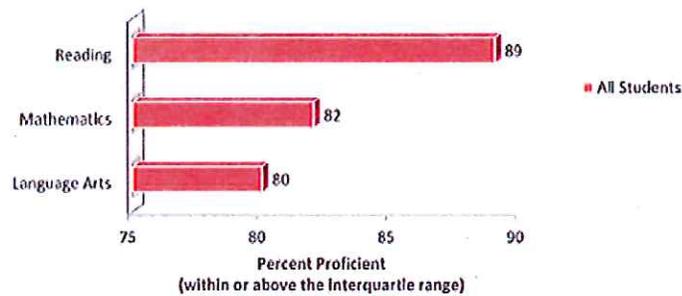
Assessment Summary Fall 2012

This brief summary is designed to provide an overview of the Academy's Scantron Performance Series student data (grades 2-8) for the Fall 2012 Required Testing Window. Also included are the Academy's current student achievement and the expected student achievement for the Spring 2013 Required Testing Window.

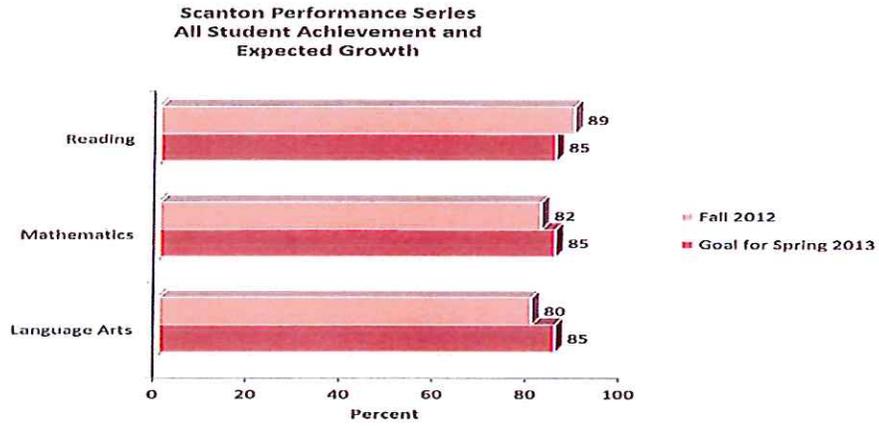
Scantron Performance Series
All Student Achievement
Fall 2012



Scantron Performance Series
All Student Achievement
Fall 2012



Michigan Connections Academy Mid-Contract Self Report



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Michigan Connections Academy

Spring 2013



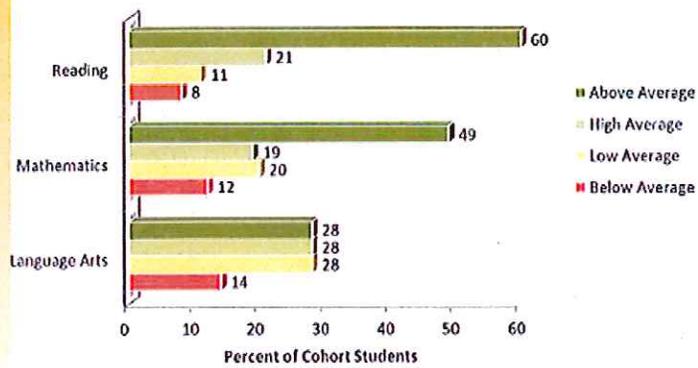
Ferris State University Charter Schools Office

Michigan Connections Academy

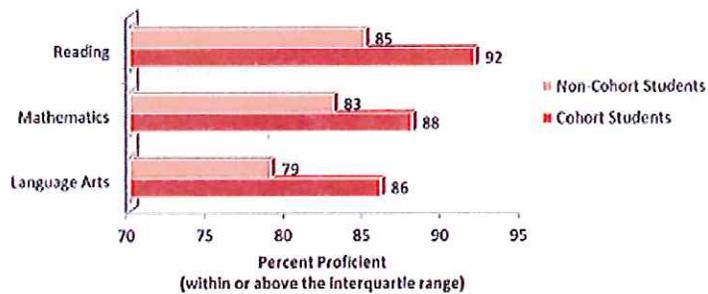
Assessment Summary Spring 2013

This brief summary is designed to provide an overview of the Academy's GlobalScholar Performance Series student data (grades 2-8) for the Spring 2013 Required Testing Window. Also included is the expected student achievement for the Spring 2013 Required Testing Window.

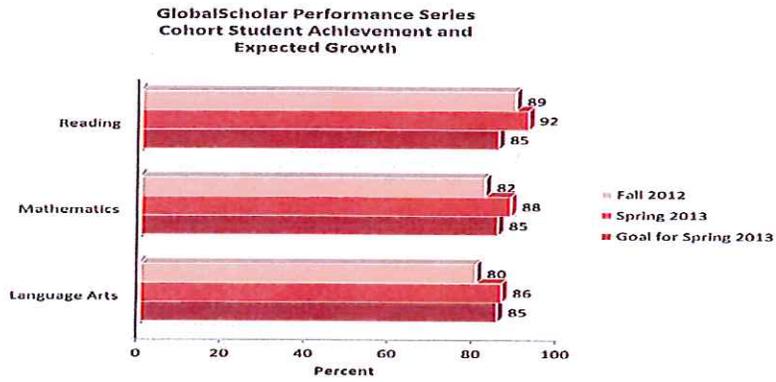
GlobalScholar Performance Series
Cohort Student Achievement
Spring 2013



GlobalScholar Performance Series
Cohort vs. Non-Cohort Student Achievement
Spring 2013



Michigan Connections Academy Mid-Contract Self Report



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Michigan Connections Academy

Fall 2013



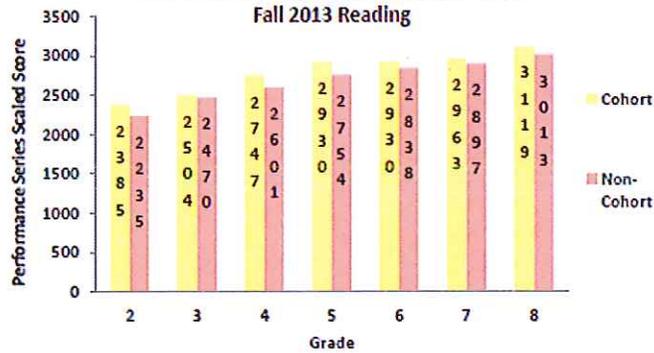
Ferris State University Charter Schools Office

Michigan Connections Academy

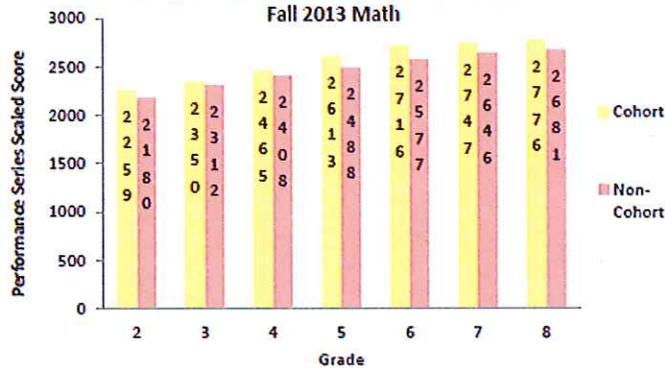
Assessment Summary Fall 2013

This brief summary is designed to provide an overview of the Academy's Scantron Performance Series student data (grades 2-8) for the Fall 2013 Testing Window. Also included are the Academy's current student achievement and the expected student achievement for the Spring 2014 Required Testing Window.

GlobalScholar Performance Series
Cohort vs. Non-Cohort Student Achievement
Fall 2013 Reading

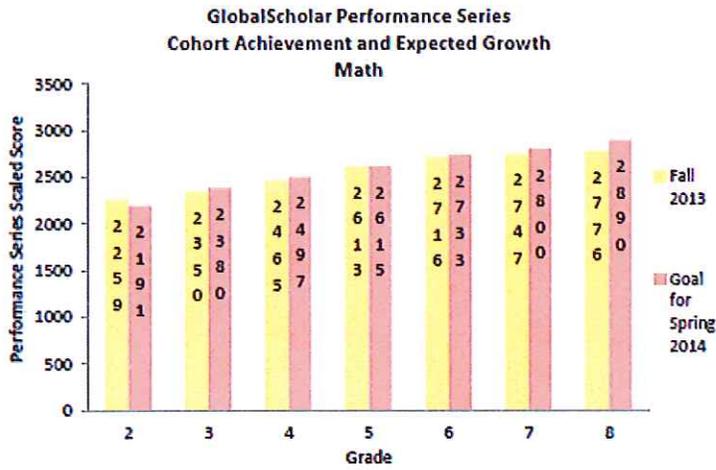
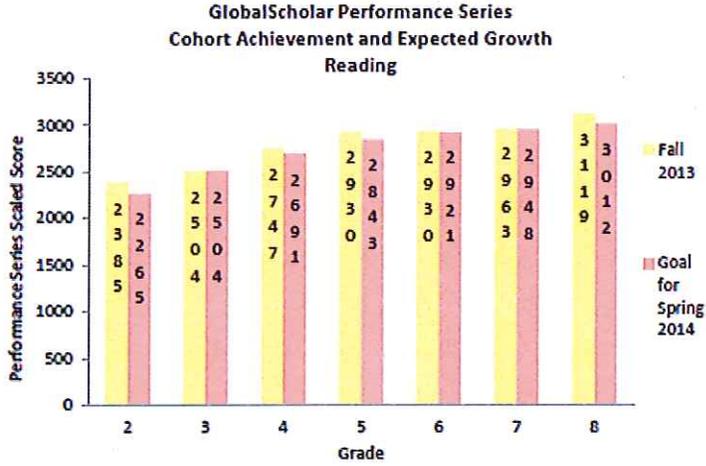


GlobalScholar Performance Series
Cohort vs. Non-Cohort Student Achievement
Fall 2013 Math



Michigan Connections Academy Mid-Contract Self Report

Michigan Connections Academy



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Winter 2013



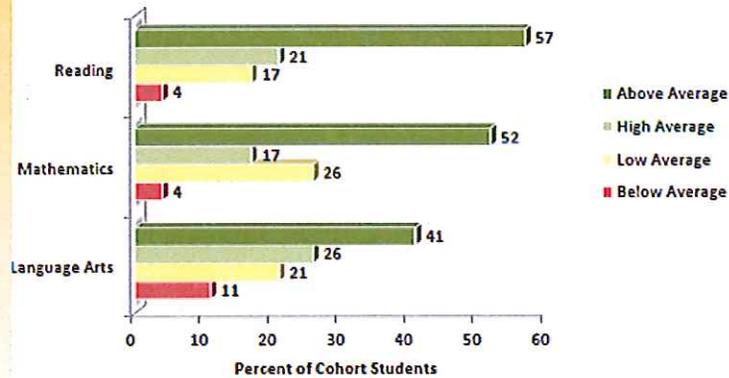
Ferris State University Charter Schools Office

Michigan Connections Academy

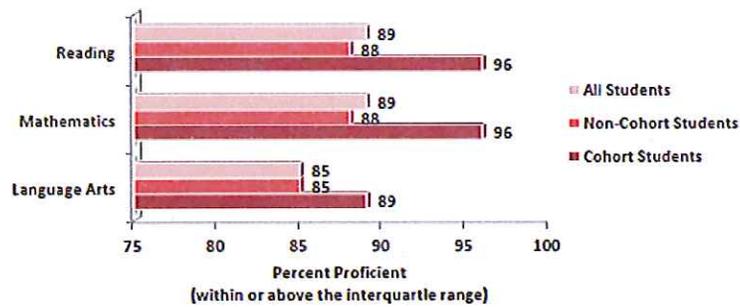
Assessment Summary Winter 2013

This brief summary is designed to provide an overview of the Academy's GlobalScholar Performance Series student data (grades 2-8) for the Winter 2013 Testing Window. Also included are the Academy's current student achievement and the expected student achievement for the Spring 2013 Required Testing Window.

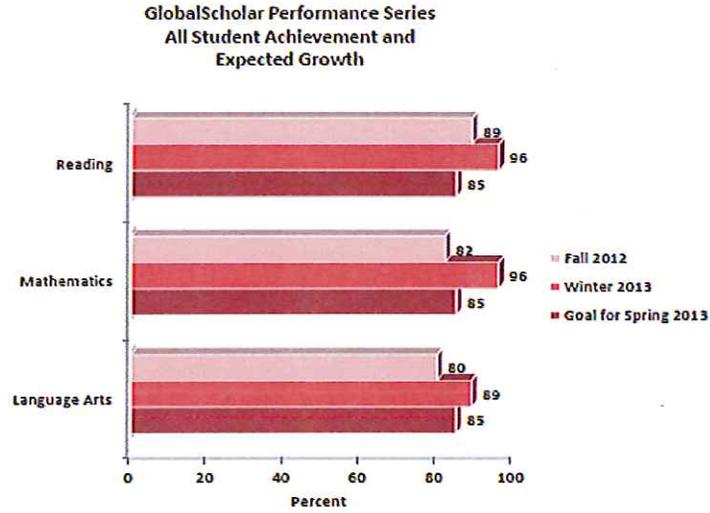
GlobalScholar Performance Series
All Student Achievement
Winter 2013



GlobalScholar Performance Series
Cohort and Non-Cohort
Winter 2013



Michigan Connections Academy Mid-Contract Self Report



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Spring 2014



Ferris State University Charter Schools Office

Michigan Connections Academy

Assessment Summary Spring 2014

This brief summary is designed to provide an overview of the Academy's Scantron Performance Series student data (grades 2-8) for the 2013-2014 School Year. Table 1 and Table 2 display reading and math achievement for cohort students with fall, winter and spring scores as well as the spring 2014 target. Table 3 and Table 4 display fall, winter and spring scores for students enrolled for the entire school year including the 70% gap growth target and college readiness target.

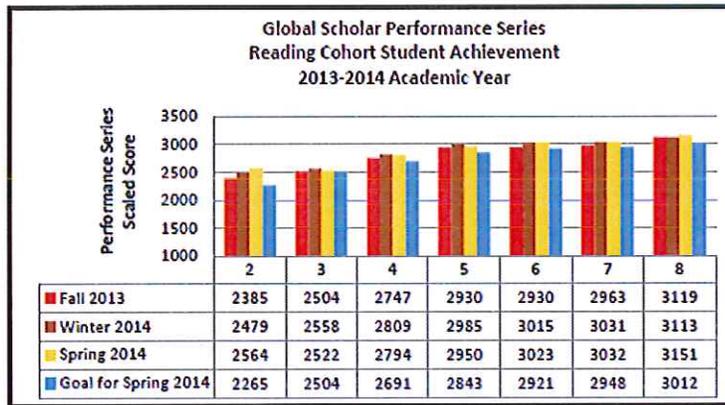


TABLE 1

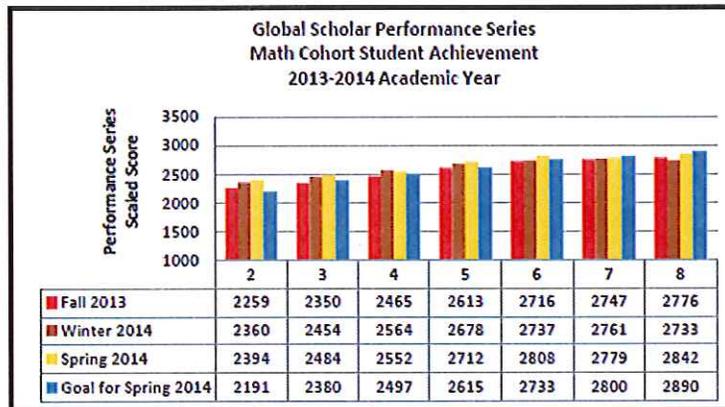


TABLE 2

Michigan Connections Academy Mid-Contract Self Report

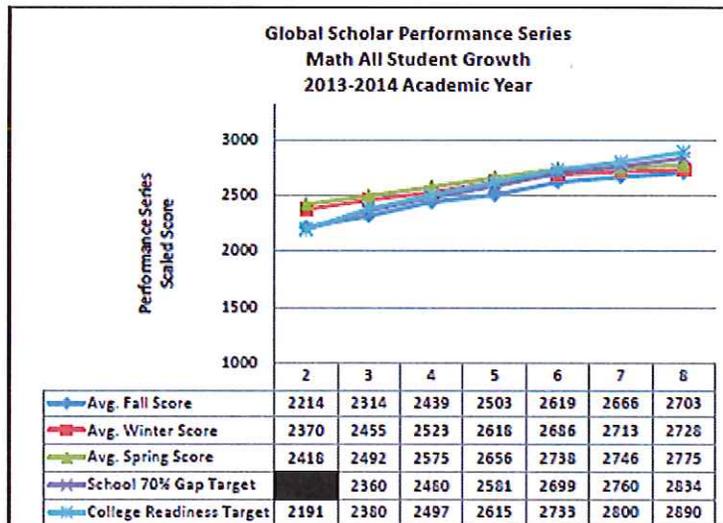
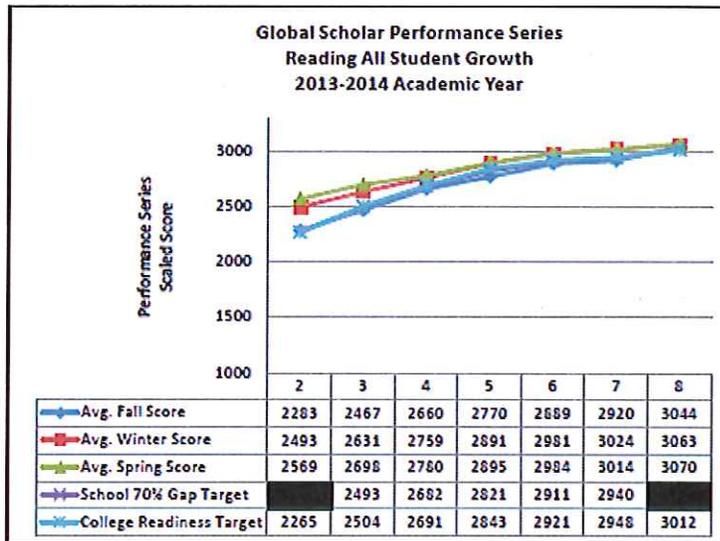


Table 4

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Fall 2014



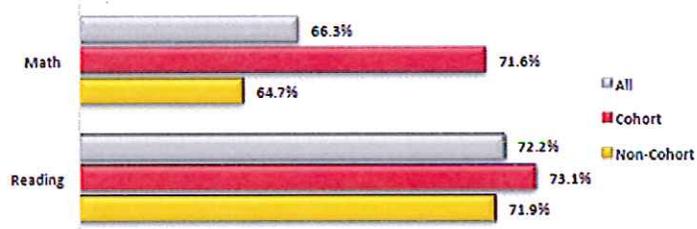
Ferris State University Charter Schools Office

Michigan Connections Academy

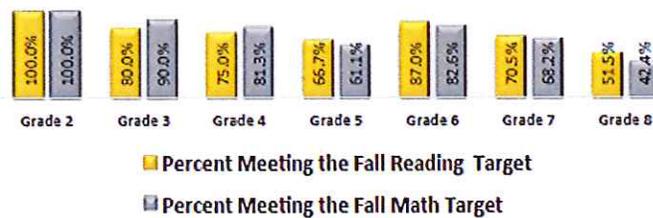
Assessment Summary Fall 2014

This brief summary is designed to provide an overview of the Academy's Scantron Performance Series student data (grades 2-8) for the Fall 2014 Required Testing Window. Also included are the Academy's current student achievement and the expected student achievement for the Spring 2015 Required Testing Window.

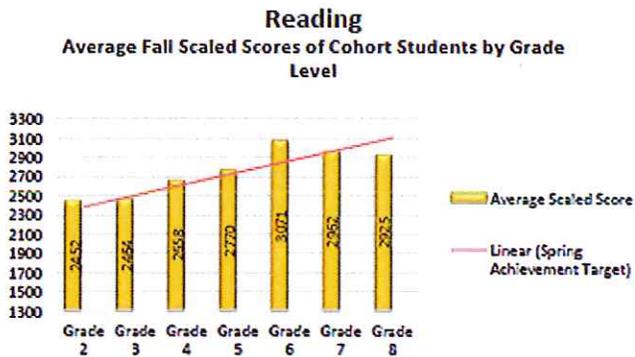
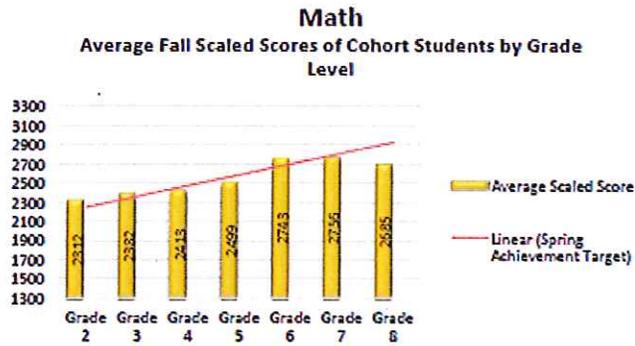
Scantron Performance Series
Percent of Students Meeting the
Fall Target



Percent of Cohort Students
Meeting Fall Target by Grade Level



Michigan Connections Academy Mid-Contract Self Report



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Winter 2014



Ferris State University Charter Schools Office

Michigan Connections Academy

Assessment Summary Winter 2014

This brief summary is designed to provide an overview of the Academy's Scantron Performance Series student data (grades 2-8) for the 2013-2014 School Year. Table 1 and Table 2 display math and reading achievement with fall/winter scores as well as the spring 2014 target. Table 3 and Table 4 display fall/winter math and reading achievement scores including the 70% gap growth target and college readiness target.

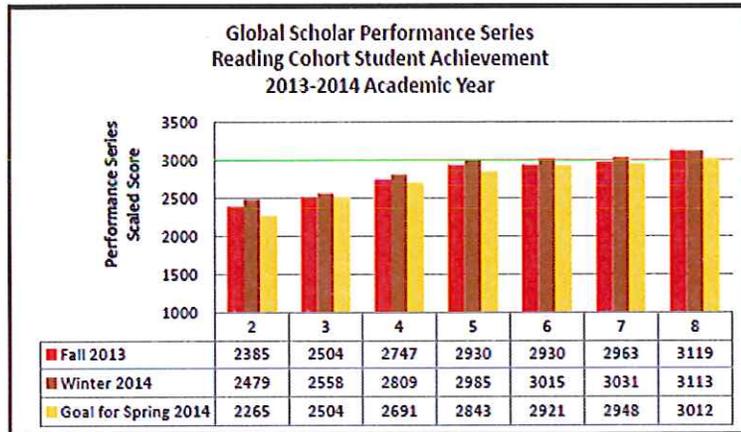


TABLE 1

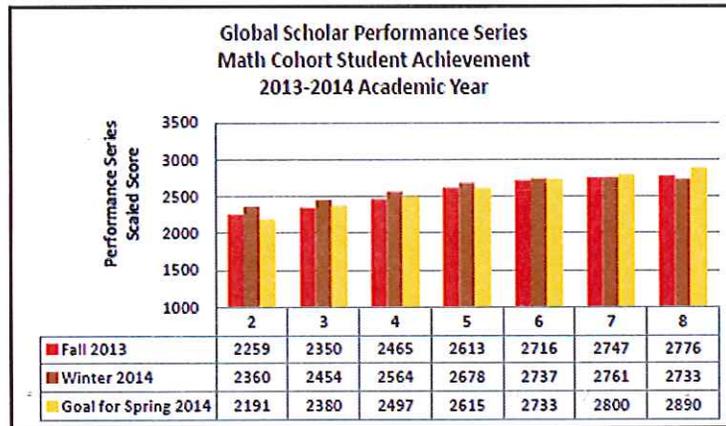


TABLE 2

Michigan Connections Academy Mid-Contract Self Report

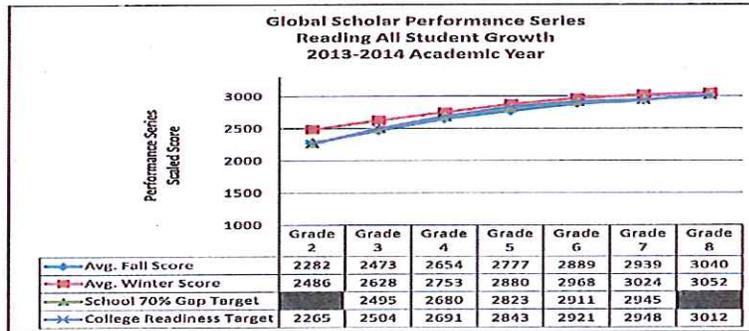


TABLE 3

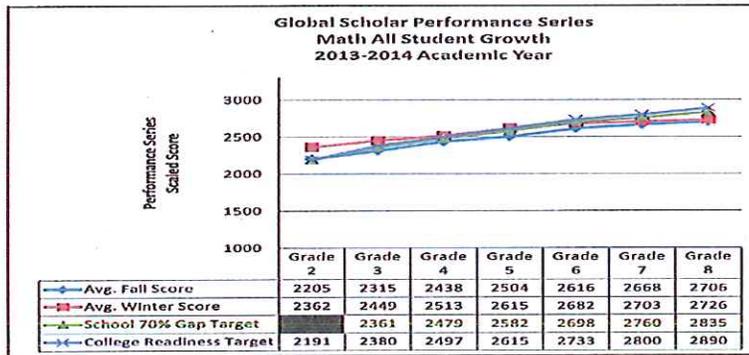


Table 4

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Spring 2015



Ferris State University Charter Schools Office

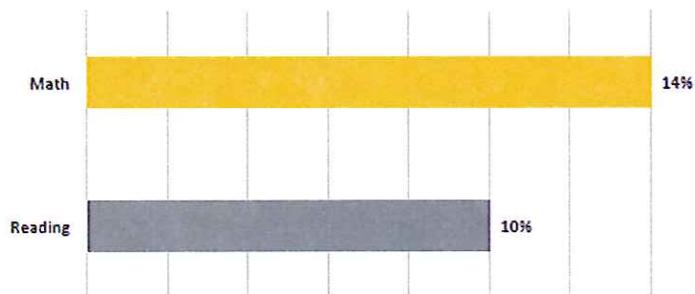
Michigan Connections Academy
Assessment Summary Spring 2015

This brief summary is designed to provide an overview of the Academy's Scantron Performance Series student data (grades 2-8) for the Spring 2015 Required Testing Window. Also included are the Academy's current student achievement and the expected student achievement for the Spring 2015 Required Testing Window.

Scantron Performance Series
Percent of Students Meeting the
Spring Target



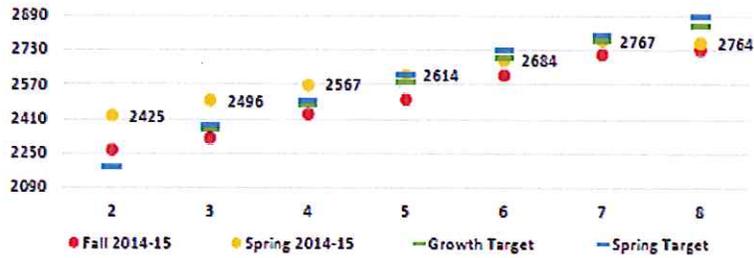
Percent of Students That Met Spring Growth Targets



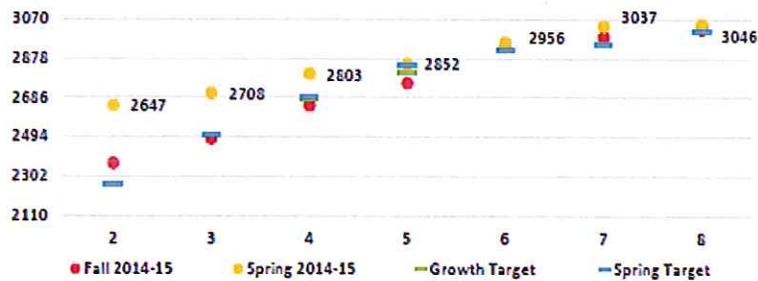
This chart indicates the percentage of students who did not meet the spring achievement target but did meet or exceed the spring growth target.

Michigan Connections Academy Mid-Contract Self Report

Average Scaled Score for All Students
by Grade Level in
Math



Average Scaled Score for All Students
by Grade Level in
Reading



(90 unmatched enrollments between MSDS and Scantron Student Import Files)

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Michigan Connections Academy

MEAP and MME Achievement Results

SUBJECT/ GRADE	2012-2013	2011-2012	CHANGE	COMPOSITE RESIDENT DISTRICT	STATE AVERAGE
Reading 3	63.6%	64.4%	-0.8%	59.5%	66.5%
Reading 4	80.4%	82.2%	-1.8%	60.8%	68.1%
Reading 5	61.6%	77.8%	-16.2%	63.5%	70.4%
Reading 6	75.0%	83.3%	-8.3%	61.7%	68.2%
Reading 7	63.5%	59.6%	3.9%	54.1%	62.0%
Reading 8	73.2%	56.9%	16.3%	58.9%	65.7%
Reading 11	52.0%	37.0%	15.0%	45.8%	53.5%
Math 3	34.5%	42.2%	-7.7%	33.5%	40.9%
Math 4	48.2%	37.8%	10.4%	37.5%	44.9%
Math 5	43.8%	33.3%	10.5%	37.4%	45.7%
Math 6	23.7%	19.0%	4.7%	32.0%	40.2%
Math 7	31.1%	36.2%	-5.1%	30.5%	38.4%
Math 8	17.1%	7.8%	9.3%	25.1%	32.5%
Math 11	29.2%	19.2%	10.0%	21.0%	28.6%

*Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) – Federal law that prohibits student identifiable education data from being publicly disseminated. A group of 10 or less students is considered to contain student identifiable data.

-- No Data Available.

Michigan Connections Academy Mid-Contract Self Report

MEAP and MME Achievement Results

SUBJECT/ GRADE	2013-2014	2012-2013	CHANGE	COMPOSITE RESIDENT DISTRICT	STATE AVERAGE
Reading 3	66.7%	63.6%	3.1%	57.7%	61.3%
Reading 4	67.0%	80.4%	-13.4%	65.4%	70.0%
Reading 5	71.3%	61.6%	9.7%	67.9%	71.7%
Reading 6	68.8%	75.0%	-6.2%	67.2%	71.5%
Reading 7	56.7%	63.5%	-6.8%	54.9%	60.4%
Reading 8	74.7%	73.2%	1.5%	67.9%	72.7%
Reading 11	68.3%	52.0%	16.3%	52.9%	58.7%
Math 3	36.6%	34.5%	2.1%	35.8%	40.2%
Math 4	36.0%	48.2%	-12.2%	40.4%	45.3%
Math 5	38.6%	43.8%	-5.2%	39.9%	45.2%
Math 6	35.2%	23.7%	11.5%	35.9%	41.5%
Math 7	33.8%	31.1%	2.7%	33.1%	39.2%
Math 8	19.6%	17.1%	2.5%	29.0%	34.5%
Math 11	20.6%	29.2%	-8.6%	22.8%	28.8%

Fig. 6

*Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) – Federal law that prohibits student identifiable education data from being publicly disseminated. A group of 10 or less students is considered to contain student identifiable data.

-- No Data Available.

Michigan Connections Academy Mid-Contract Self Report

MICA 2014 CCR Growth Metrics

ACT Explore to ACT Plan - students who tested both with MICA - FAY students
2013 - 2014 Academic Year

	DISCIPLINE					
	Composite	English	Math	Reading	Science	
Explore	18.03	17.93	16.45	17.24	19.72	
Plan	19.14	18.86	18.34	18.62	19.9	
MICA 70% Target Gap	met target	met target	18.24 (met goal)	met target	19.92 (met goal)	
CCR Target	18.00	15.00	19.00	18.00	20.00	

ACT Explore to ACT Plan - students who tested both with MICA - FSU 3+ years enrolled cohort
2013 - 2014 Academic Year

	DISCIPLINE					
	Composite	English	Math	Reading	Science	
Explore	18.27	18.18	17.09	17.45	20.27	
Plan	20.36	19.91	18.82	20.27	21.18	
MICA 70% Target Gap	met target	met target	18.43 (met goal)	met target	met target	
CCR Target	18.00	15.00	19.00	18.00	20.00	

ACT Plan to ACT - students who tested both with MICA - FAY students
2013 - 2014 Academic Year

	DISCIPLINE					
	Composite	English	Math	Reading	Science	
Plan	18.52	18.52	17.19	18.74	19.04	
ACT	20.11	19.44	18.67	21.26	20.3	
MICA 70% Target Gap	20.26	met target	20.56	21.02 (met goal)	21.81	
CCR Target	21.00	18.00	22.00	22.00	23.00	

ACT Plan to ACT - students who tested both with MICA - FSU 3+ years enrolled cohort
2013 - 2014 Academic Year

	DISCIPLINE					
	Composite	English	Math	Reading	Science	
Plan	19.6	18.8	17.9	20.5	20.9	
ACT	21.5	20.3	20.2	23.4	21.4	
MICA 70% Target Gap	met target	met target	20.77	met goal	22.37	
CCR Target	21.00	18.00	22.00	22.00	23.00	

Michigan Connections Academy Mid-Contract Self Report

MICA 2015 CCR Growth Metics

ACT Explore to ACT Plan - students who tested both with MICA - FAY students
2014 - 2015 Academic Year

	DISCIPLINE					
	Composite	English	Math	Reading	Science	
Explore	17.23	17.27	16.14	16.7	18.25	
Plan	17.82	17.14	16.62	18.27	18.89	
MICA 70% Target Gap	17.77	met target	18.14	met target	19.48	
CCR Target	18.00	15.00	19.00	18.00	20.00	

ACT Explore to ACT Plan - students who tested both with MICA - FSU 3+ years enrolled cohort
2014 - 2015 Academic Year

	DISCIPLINE					
	Composite	English	Math	Reading	Science	
Explore	17.3	17.39	16.39	16.76	18.21	
Plan	18.03	17.36	17.06	18.33	19.00	
MICA 70% Target Gap	met target	met target	18.22	met target	19.46	
CCR Target	18.00	15.00	19.00	18.00	20.00	

ACT Plan to ACT - students who tested both with MICA - FAY students
2014 - 2015 Academic Year

	DISCIPLINE					
	Composite	English	Math	Reading	Science	
Plan	18.49	18.71	17.89	18.09	19.2	
ACT	20.07	20.02	18.71	21.51	19.58	
MICA 70% Target Gap	20.25	met target	20.77	met goal	21.86	
CCR Target	21.00	18.00	22.00	22.00	23.00	

ACT Plan to ACT - students who tested both with MICA - FSU 3+ years enrolled cohort
2014 - 2015 Academic Year

	DISCIPLINE					
	Composite	English	Math	Reading	Science	
Plan	19.53	19.8	18.67	18.87	20.13	
ACT	21.00	22.00	19.07	23.87	20.87	
MICA 70% Target Gap	met target	met target	21.00	met target	22.14	
CCR Target	21.00	18.00	22.00	22.00	23.00	

Michigan Connections Academy Mid-Contract Self Report

Educational Goals and Related Measures

The Academy shall pursue the educational goal of preparing all students academically for success in college, work and life.

It is expected that the Academy will meet the State of Michigan's accreditation standards and any improvement targets required to be achieved pursuant to state and federal law.

The Academy is also expected to remain off the Priority and Focus school lists published by the Michigan Department of Education. If the Academy already has school buildings identified on these lists, it is expected to make the progress necessary for them to no longer be identified on the Priority and Focus school lists.

MICA continues to meet the State of Michigan's accreditation standards and improvement targets as outlined by state and federal law. We were identified as a Focus School by Michigan Department of Education at the start of the 2014-2015 school year. We readily and consistently meet the requirements set out by MDE as we work to get off the Focus School list. The nature of our more transient population, and the type of students our charter school attracts, however, lend us to be the perfect candidate for identification as a Focus School. That fact does not deter our efforts to work diligently to ensure that every child, every day, is able to learn to his or her highest potential. As a Focus School, we ensure that all state reporting requirements are met in a timely fashion, and continue to strive to get off the Focus School list. The MICA Quarterly Focus School reports will be available at the on-site review.

Strategic Planning (5 Points)

- *Outline the process all stakeholders within the Academy utilize to develop both long-and short- term strategic planning.*

What reviewers will look for:

The Academy provides evidence that all stakeholders (teachers, parents, students, staff, and board members) have input into the process. Is there a specific time of year that strategic planning occurs? How is the process communicated to stakeholders? Once the strategic planning is complete, where is the Academy's Strategic Plan housed? How often is the Strategic Plan reviewed and updated? How does the board ensure that it is appropriating resources to fulfill the stated Strategic Plan?

Michigan Connections Academy Mid-Contract Self Report

RESPONSE

A Strategic Planning Session is included as an agenda item of the Board meetings each month; these sessions include discussion of any necessary topics related to strategic planning, including student achievement, staff retention/development, brand recognition, balanced budget, and systematic growth. Mr. Klochack also discusses many of these items each month during his School Leader Report, another standing agenda item, which includes the Phase 1 Update portion, which is required for MICA's designation as a Focus School.

While the Board reviews particular strategic planning items each month, at the Annual Meeting in June, the Board also reviews the successes of the current year's plan, develops and approves a Strategic Plan and Goals document for the upcoming school year. This strategic plan takes into account the School Improvement Plan developed by MICA's School Improvement Team. This team consists of school administration, teachers, non-certified staff, parents and a school board representative; this team takes into account the various forms of feedback from stakeholder groups (see below) utilized by MICA to inform their overall thinking about the strategic plan. All stakeholders receive the agenda for the Annual Meeting 7 days before the meeting date. The most recent strategic plan was approved on June 30, 2015.

The strategic plan document is also included within the meeting materials folder on the Virtual Library within Connexus for the meeting date at which it was created and approved. All Board members and CE stakeholders have access to this Virtual Library folder in Connexus. The Board Chair also has a copy within her records.

The Board initiates any necessary discussion on resources to fulfill the Strategic Plan each month during Board meetings. The Board also receives a Financial Report each month, and reviews all school financials and invoices to ensure resources are appropriated properly.

MICA provides all stakeholder groups with a variety of formal and informal opportunities to provide feedback about the school and share their vision for improvements, thereby ensuring they have a voice in the overall strategic planning process.

1. MICA conducts annual parent, student, and staff satisfaction surveys. These surveys are administered by a third party and allow stakeholders to provide anonymous feedback on their satisfaction with the school and its curriculum, services, teachers, staff, and leadership, as well as other topics such as opportunities for social interaction. One of MICA's annual goals is always built around increasing parent satisfaction, and these goals inform the overall strategic planning process for MICA.
2. The StarTrack lesson rating system allows students, teachers, and Learning Coaches to provide ratings and comments on every lesson in every course. This feedback is used to drive improvements not only to the course content, but to the overall course design and delivery. Star Track Rating System.
3. In addition, the Feedback link in Connexus, the MICA education management system, allows stakeholders to provide written feedback about any aspect of their school experience.

Michigan Connections Academy Mid-Contract Self Report

Student End of Course Surveys gather input from students at all grade levels about course design and content and the teacher. These surveys are used to improve courses and instruction.

In addition to these formal channels for feedback, all stakeholders (parents, students, teachers, school staff, community members, others) are welcome to contact the school via phone, WebMail, email, etc., or to stop by the school, to share their thoughts for improvement. MICA school board meetings are open to the public and the public is welcome to attend and comment.

Michigan Connections Academy Mid-Contract Self Report

Professional Development (5 Points)

- *Describe the Academy's process for determining and carrying out professional development for faculty and staff.*

What reviewers will look for:

How is professional development determined? How is classroom application monitored? Are topics revisited for reinforcement? Is it adequately funded? During the review period, how many new initiatives have been instituted and monitored? Professional development calendars, presenters, and staff check-in/check-out sheets may also be used as evidence of quality professional development practices.

MICA teachers receive professional support from three (3) areas: 1) Training and continuous Professional Development sessions from Connections, 2) Internal support through school-led professional development, PLCs, and manager support and 3) State-required mentoring and evaluation

Connections offers a wide range of professional development opportunities, including a regular schedule of topics relevant to best practices in online learning, and also creates "on demand" professional development on topics requested by the school.

Plans for professional development of staff are housed within the Single Building District Improvement Plan, which was approved by the MICA Board on June 30, 2015.

Internal Professional Learning initiatives are determined through the School Improvement Plan process. MICA staff, administrators, parents and non-certified staff determine professional development needs through the process of a Comprehensive Needs Analysis. This process involves utilizing student achievement and feedback data to determine areas of strength and weakness in our pedagogy. Through this process, we seek out appropriate professional development activities to help improve staff and student performance, for example, MICA's student achievement in the area of writing in all grade levels and content areas continued to demonstrate as an area of weakness. Over the past two years, we have been working with writing consultants to provide on-going, job-embedded professional development to all MICA teaching staff to improve our teaching skills to improve student achievement. Preliminary information indicates that we will soon be seeking out the same opportunities in Math.

Michigan Connections Academy Mid-Contract Self Report

MICA has worked in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) for four years. This is something that we pride ourselves on tremendously. In addition, we are continuously working towards improving our effectiveness to ensure every single student is achieving to his or her potential. School leadership team has high expectations for teaching and learning at MICA, which are facilitated and supported through the PLC process. Through the PLC structure, we have identified SMART goals with action strategies, an outlined meeting calendar, team norms, and agenda outlines. The expectations have been set and communicated for teacher participation in student support meetings, including our student support team process, RTI monitoring, and child welfare protocol. PLC meetings are held and updated weekly within our IA system, so all stakeholders are contributing and held accountable to the process to increase student achievement.

Teachers benefit from ongoing and effective professional growth. The training begins with an initial teacher orientation course and several days of training at the start of the school year. Teachers are provided with an interactive program manual as a resource to training course segments and specific Connections professional development courses. Teachers build a strong foundation for teaching in the virtual environment with student success as a focus.

Teacher professional development is critically important in ensuring that the staff is optimally effective at teaching in a virtual environment and addressing curriculum standards in their daily instructional practice. The school uses the *National Standards for Quality Online Teaching* published by the International Association for K-12 Online Learning (iNACOL)¹ and the Connections *Core Standards for Facilitating Student Learning*, as guides for pinpointing necessary teacher skills and professional development requirements.

The *Core Standards for Facilitating Student Learning* are:

- provide high quality instruction focused on student learning,
- personalize student programs,
- monitor student performance and provide timely feedback and intervention,
- monitor student participation,
- communicate frequently,
- document and review all interactions, and
- collaborate and develop professionally.

MICA provides its teachers with a comprehensive teacher training and professional development program to equip them with the following:

- a working knowledge of the curriculum,
- strategies and best practices for virtual learning and instruction,
- the ability to utilize and navigate the tools of Connexus,

¹ National Standards for Quality Online Teaching, iNACOL, www.inacol.org,
<http://www.inacol.org/resources/nationalstandards/NACOL%20Standards%20Quality%20Online%20Teaching.pdf>

Michigan Connections Academy Mid-Contract Self Report

- the ability to develop Personalized Learning Plans (PLP),
- information on the forms of assessment and how to utilize test results to guide instruction and monitor student progress,
- knowledge of program processes and policies, and
- information on how to foster a virtual school community.

MICA School Leadership team focuses on coordinating, planning, delivering, and continuously supporting professional learning initiatives through a systematic and comprehensive multi-year professional development plan. The Administrative team provides educators with professional growth opportunities designed to increase student achievement, personalize learning for students preparing for college and careers, and increase teaching effectiveness.

Professional Learning is:

- **Intensive** – Participants will identify the purpose of educational practices and examine how they can be implemented in the virtual environment. Participants will collaboratively discuss strategies that can be implemented with students.
- **Ongoing** – New instructional strategies and the latest learning research will be connected to topics presented and discussed in prior sessions to demonstrate how specific educational practices form the “big picture” of effective instruction.
- **Connected to Practice** – Following each session, to apply what they have learned to their professional practice. Teachers collaborate with their colleagues in the PLC meetings and the process of application of Professional Development are monitored through the PLC process and IA system.

All teachers meet once every three weeks with their individual Administrative Supervisor as a part of our ongoing Professional Development initiatives. The 2015-2016 school year is the second year for these meetings. These discussions focus around improving pedagogy, implementing Professional Learning, and unpacking of individual teacher classroom data to guide instruction.

The classroom application of expectations for teaching at MICA, and growth and improvements in teaching effectiveness resulting from professional development, are monitored and reviewed in several ways. All employees are evaluated based on competencies along with state required metrics on student performance. These professional competencies align with the Core Standards for Facilitating Student Learning, which are supported by professional development, and may vary by type of teaching position (e.g. Special Education). Competencies are reviewed with employees at the beginning of the school year and are available to employees for viewing and comment throughout the school year on the Human Resources Information System’s Performance Management system.

Employees receive a formal mid-year review in December or January, and a formal end-of-year review in May or June, as documented in the **Employee Handbook** Section entitled Performance and Disciplinary Action, Employee Performance Management.

Competencies for teachers (and other staff) are evaluated in the context of School Goals which evaluate student growth and achievement metrics, and observations of an employee’s proficiency

Michigan Connections Academy Mid-Contract Self Report

within each competency are evaluated using various methods, including parent and student feedback, observations of lessons and interactions, and review of relevant documentation and data.

The outcome of an individual teacher's evaluation affects future decisions regarding staff retention, promotional opportunities, or disciplinary action and termination decisions.

The **LiveLesson Teacher Observation Form** is used by supervisors to evaluate the effectiveness of teacher LiveLesson (computer based live instruction) sessions.

In conjunction with the requirement of the State of Michigan, MICA has a New Teacher Mentor Program in which all new teachers are matched with a mentor as designated through state expectations. Additionally, if a teacher joins MICA staff and has more than 3 years of experience, that teacher is assigned a mentor to help their acclimation to the world of virtual online teaching and learning.

Much of the professional development used by MICA is provided as part of the services provided by Connections, as describe in the MICA/Connections EPSA, therefore does not need to be separately budgeted School based Professional Development opportunities are funded in conjunction with Title II and General funds.

Several new initiatives have been instituted by Connections during the review period. The professional development for Connections teachers expanded from one "level" to now encompass the 100, 200, and 300 level series, based on the amount of time a teacher has been with Connections. In addition, every year Connections adds to both the breadth and depth of the professional development offerings; during in the last couple of years, Connections has focused on adding professional development and trainings related to the learning sciences, particularly around providing effective feedback; student engagement and persistence, and practice as it relates to mastery of material. Teacher and staff attendance at professional development is tracked via Connexus and time is spent during individual meeting times to review the work.

School Culture (5 Points)

Michigan Connections Academy Mid-Contract Self Report

- *Describe how the Academy has established a safe and orderly environment that is conducive to student learning and high academic expectations.*

What reviewers will look for:

Evidence that all staff members share the responsibility in caring for student discipline on a daily basis. Do adults model the behavior they insist upon from the students? How does the Academy share its behavior expectations with staff, students, and parents? What behavioral programs have been implemented at the Academy (Character Education, Love and Logic, RTC, etc.)?

RESPONSE

MICA is a culture for high achievement. We have high expectations for our students and all staff. Our Core Standards for Facilitating Student Learning outlines expectations for our staff and represents a shared belief for student achievement. All school staff and members of the school community are held to the same high expectations as are students, and are expected to conduct themselves in a way that fosters a safe, supportive community. The School Handbook: General Portion and the MICA School Handbook Supplement, especially Section 3.1, Roles and Responsibilities, and Section 9 (and all subsections), Conduct, Due Process, and Communication, sets forth expectations for all members of the school community. The Employee Handbook sets forth policies for employee behavior as well as other employment policies, and all employees are required to sign the **Code of Conduct** annually. As teachers and other school staff interact with students via LiveLesson, phone, discussion and message boards, WebMail, field trips and events – in any school setting – they model the behavior they expect of students, and guide and coach student behavior.

Student Safety

Concerns of student safety are evident in the Honor code, **School Handbook: General Portion and School Handbook Supplement, Employee Handbook**, during Welcome Calls, and Student and Staff Orientations.

MICA provides a safe and supportive environment by keeping students safe from online predators and solicitors. MICA takes student safety and well-being seriously. MICA is committed to following and implementing health and safety requirements applicable to public virtual charter schools. Students should be able to learn in a safe and comfortable environment. MICA requires staff to complete the following two courses focused on safety:

- **Internet Safety** - An Internet Safety Course for students, parents, and Learning Coaches is provided by Connections. It is an i-SAFE course that provides information about the various threats, challenges, and safety protocols needed to work and learn online. It contains valuable information about practicing safe behaviors online. This course is also required training for all school staff.

Michigan Connections Academy Mid-Contract Self Report

- **Students in Distress: Recognizing and Responding** - The Connections course, Students in Distress: Recognizing and Responding, is required for all staff and designed to help teachers and other school staff become familiar with the signs of distress such as bullying/cyber bullying, neglect and abuse, depression or other issues that would keep them from doing their best and to know how to respond promptly and professionally when they observe such signs or behaviors.
- **The Teacher Orientation Unit 10, Collective Responsibilities, and particularly Lesson 3, Student Discipline**, is part of the required training for all teachers, and ensures that they understand and communicate the “collective responsibilities” for ensuring a safe, comfortable, productive learning environment.

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

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

Connections’ Technical Support is able to assist families with installing programs that enable automatic blocking of adult, phishing, and identity theft sites via DNS filtering. Technical Support can also assist families with modifying browser security settings that limit potential malicious activity and installing CyberSitter (<http://cybersitter.com/>).

School Safety Plan

MICA recognizes its need for a school safety plan. The school is committed to providing a safe, orderly learning environment for students and a safe, orderly working environment for employees. MICA’s Board of Directors has reviewed and approved the school safety plan as well.

School safety is the primary responsibility of the Principal and his/her designee. They will oversee the security systems of as well as the behavior of the students and fellow employees and reporting violations. In addition, all staff members will be expected to report to administration any inappropriate behavior in the school environment. It is the primary responsibility of staff to create a climate of respect and educational focus. Students are expected to set a tone of respect, order, and purposefulness. Particular responsibility falls to staff to model good and safe behavior and to correct or report to the school administration inappropriate or unsafe behavior or events.

Student Onboarding

A formal Onboarding Program was created and launched in SY 2014-15. The Program includes Getting Started courses for all late enrolling students (defined as starting one or more days beyond the start of first semester). The new Onboarding Program was designed to better engage families and support their transition to MICA. Staff are provided with a “Who’s New” alert on their Homepage/Dashboard in Connexus to help them better serve late-enrolling students.

Michigan Connections Academy Mid-Contract Self Report

Learning Coach Resources

New for SY 2015-16 is the Get Coaching! Program offering helpful resources to inform, connect, and encourage Learning Coaches. The program includes:

- Learning Coach Central – a hub of resources and links
- Learning Coach Link – a monthly communication distributed via WebMail messages
- National Learning Coach Resource Sessions – synchronous online meetings with Learning Coaches across the Connections community.

New Homepages in Connexus

A refreshed look” for Connexus was rolled out in SY 2015-16 to enhance the ease of use for all school staff, students, and Learning Coaches/Caretakers. For school staff, this new look enhances data visualization to give teachers an approved approach to viewing data about their sections and students. All users have access to tutorials to help them navigate the improvements.

Additional tools and strategies support the school culture and belief that all learning can be adaptable to meet individual student needs.

Supplemental Instructional Support Programs (SISPs) provide some students with the strategic intervention and progress monitoring they need. Once a teacher determines the student’s skill deficit and determines an SISP could help the student, the teacher needs to determine which SISP is best suited for the student's needs.

Alerts on the Teacher Homepage are another tool in Connexus that help teachers quickly identify students who may have non-academic factors affecting their path to success.

The alerts column will display one or more letters if there are factors that may impact a student’s success:

E – Education level of the Caretaker/Learning Coach

Students who have Caretakers or Learning Coaches who have at least graduated high school are more successful at Connections Education.

G – Grade level does not align / Predicted Graduation Cohort

Students in grades K–8 who are on or above grade level are more successful at Connections Education.

Students in grades 9–12 who are predicted to graduate on time are more successful at Connections Education.

L – Late enrolling student

Students who start the school year on time are more successful at Connections Education.

R – Reason the student is attending a Connections Education school. Students who do not have a history of disciplinary problems or who were not struggling academically at their previous school are more successful at Connections Education.

Michigan Connections Academy Mid-Contract Self Report

Challenges and Opportunities (5 Points)

- *As the Academy approaches reauthorization, what are the biggest challenges it faces? How does the Academy intend to address these challenges?*

What reviewers will look for:

There will be narrative that shows long-range planning to address challenges facing the Academy. As much as possible, resources should be identified along with a timetable for implementation. Identify how the challenges have been incorporated into the School Improvement Plan, how the plan will be monitored, and by whom.

RESPONSE

The primary challenges facing MICA over the next few years will be focusing on continued academic growth and maintenance of the high quality education we continue to provide our students. As noted above in this report, we have identified those areas of greatest need and are focusing efforts on improving academic achievement through teacher training and professional development, revisions to curricula and teacher practices, and new initiatives, supported by Connections, specifically related to improvements in Math and writing.

While we still have legislative and governmental procedural barriers to overcome, our major legislative difficulties are behind us. Legislatively, we continue to face challenges regarding the lack of equitable special education funding and timely reimbursement of funding of special education services from resident districts throughout the state of Michigan. We are working with Connections Education, our legislative liaison, and education advocates very closely to determine the most effective and appropriate way to be able to obtain the same special education funding levels our students deserve and our staff require. We have learned that we also must maintain a close watch on the legislative process, as we continually have to work to ensure that non-cyber school proponents are not able to pass legislation that might be detrimental to our school or our students.

While the MICA Board still has difficulties staffing a full capacity Board, MICA has a solid core group of Board members who are dedicated to our school and success. We will continue to support the Board to recruit additional board members and support them as they ensure they have access to trainings on being effective as a governing board.

Michigan Connections Academy Mid-Contract Self Report

MICA administrators, staff and families are generally very pleased with our programming and academic success, and continually strive to be the “school every other school aspires to be”. We have a solid RTI system in place, and are constantly looking to improve the services we provide to students who struggle academically and socially. Our highest priority continues to focus on maintaining educational integrity, personalized instruction, and high levels of student achievement. While we are proud of our achievements, we embrace a culture of continual improvement and are always looking for ways to improve our areas of strength while continuing to focus improvement efforts on those areas that most need our attention.

Reauthorization/Mid-Contract Review Application Signature Page*

Board Signatures:

Pinda L Frost
Name

Jan 27, 2016
Date

Name

Date

Date of Board meeting review 1/20/16

*Mid-Contract Review Self Study:
Due to Epicenter no later than 5:00 pm, 30 business days prior to scheduled visitation

TO: Connections Academy School Boards and State/District Partners
FROM: Patricia Hoge, Senior Vice President of Curriculum and Instruction
and Chief Academic Officer
SUBJECT: Introduction of the 2012–2013 Curriculum and Instructional Program
DATE: March 7, 2012
CC: Barbara Dreyer, President
Steven Guttentag, Chief Education Officer
VPs and Directors of Schools
School Principals



This year we celebrated our tenth year as a provider of high-quality, highly accountable virtual education solutions for students in grades K–12. For ten years we have focused our efforts on helping students achieve their best in a learning environment focused on innovation, personalized instruction, and continuous improvement. As we welcome the next decade of Connections Academy, we continue to focus our resources on curriculum improvements and new curriculum options that equip our students with the skills, knowledge, and expertise they need to succeed in work and life in the 21st century. The 2012–2013 curriculum offerings continue to provide individual schools with an increased ability for differentiation between the course offerings to enable the overall offering to better fit each student population, state requirements, and funding considerations. As always, we based these decisions on feedback from our families, our boards, and our teachers.

The acquisition of Connections Education by Pearson, the world’s leading learning company, in the fall of 2011 has already provided multiple opportunities for Connections Education curriculum and design teams to collaborate with Pearson developers to create even more robust online offerings. As a global leader in education, Pearson provides an array of digital learning materials and resources, many of which are being incorporated into 2012–13 curriculum offerings. This memorandum introduces the *2012–2013 Connections Academy Program Guide*, which contains a detailed overview of the instructional program, courses, and curriculum materials and resources.

CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT AND STUDENT PERFORMANCE

Connections Academy continues to employ a team of experienced and talented curriculum development specialists, curriculum project managers, content and copy editors, and multimedia designers. These individuals apply their deep expertise in online instruction and academic disciplines to the development of curriculum that supports 21st century readiness for every student. Focused on implementation of the



Framework for 21st Century Learning¹, they work to integrate supportive technologies, inquiry- and problem-based instructional approaches, and higher order thinking skills into all curriculum development efforts.

Central to the curriculum design process is the systematic evaluation of curriculum offerings. The evaluation phase consists of both formative and summative measures to determine the value and effectiveness of the curriculum offerings. This multi-level evaluation system incorporates regular reviews of student performance results, user feedback, assessment performance analysis, and district, state, and national content standards and course requirements. This feedback is collected daily through our StarTrack system, EMS feedback tool, our annual Parent Satisfaction survey, and from conversations and comments made by our board members.

Throughout this past school year all members of our school and curriculum leadership teams have participated in a book study on Richard DuFour and Robert Marzano's recent publication *Leaders of Learning: How District, School, and Classroom Leaders Improve Student Achievement*². As we asked ourselves the critical question "How do we know our students are learning?" we embraced the authors' three big ideas—ensuring all students learn at high levels, working collaboratively to meet the needs of each student, and operating in a results oriented environment where we are hungry for evidence of student learning. Our commitment to continuous improvement continues to be displayed in the latest 2011–2012 StarTrack lesson ratings from students, teachers, and Learning Coaches, as well as in our 2010–2-11 AP, SAT, ACT, and State Testing exam performance.

Star Track Lesson/Course Ratings – March 2012 (2011–2012 School Year to date)

- Total ratings – 601,395
- Total ratings with comments – 24,598
- Average rating – 4.19 (2010–2011 rating – 4.16)

AP Exam Scores (2010–2011 scores reported on a 5-point scale)

- National AP Performance Scores
 - 57.5 % scored 3 – Qualified, 4 – Well Qualified and 5 – Extremely Well Qualified
- Connections Academy students
 - 67.7 % scored 3 – Qualified, 4 – Well Qualified and 5 – Extremely Well Qualified
 - 16.2% scored 5 (up from 8.6% in 2009–2010)
 - 25 % scored 4 (up from 21.9% in 2009–2010)

SAT and ACT 2010–2011

¹ Partnership for 21st Century Skills' Framework for 21st Century Learning: WASHINGTON, DC 20001: 2011

² Leaders of Learning: Solution Tree Press, 2011

- ACT
 - National average composite score 21.1
 - Connections Academy (CA) students average composite score 22

- SAT
 - CA average critical reading 579 (national average 497)
 - CA average math score 517 (national average 514)
 - CA average writing score 532 (national average 489)
 - CA average combined score 1628 (national average is 1500)

State Testing

- CA students scored higher than the statewide Reading averages in all grades.
- Compared to similar students working in a like environment (*i.e.*, our closest national competitor) CA students scored higher in all grades in reading, 8 out of 9 grades in math, all grades in science, and 6 out of 7 grades in writing.
- The Regional Economic Studies Institute of Towson University (RESI) was tasked by Connections Education to verify comparison of 2010–2011 state proficiency tests administered to students in the Connections Academy program, public schools, and K–12 program. Please see attached for the RESI report statements.

In support of our continued and dedicated focus on student learning, we have deepened our reflection, discussions, and analysis of student learning through increased system functionality, enhanced data reporting tools, and expanded professional development opportunities. While we are pleased with the progress we have made, we still need more of our students taking AP courses and going on to college. We also still have high levels of students who are not proficient on their state exams, particularly in math and writing, which demands our attention.

As a result, we have continued to evolve our instructional model to ensure students' mastery of all required standards. For example, new functionality within the Connexus® education management system (EMS) enables the direct tagging of individual lessons to state, national, and Common Core State Standards. A new Lesson Objective Report, available to teachers from their GradeBook, provides teachers with a detailed report of the alignment of lessons to standards. This increased access and functionality assists teachers in determining the degree of alignment between expectations and curricular content, and guides their instructional practices and evaluation of student performance. In addition, a newly enhanced feature of the curriculum management system enables the reordering of curriculum units within and between courses to ensure the sequence of instruction aligns to state specific expectations and testing cycles. This functionality will result in the reordering of units in more than 100 courses for 2012–2013 based on schools' prioritized requests.

While we believe state standardized test results are an important component in determining and monitoring student academic performance, we do not want to lose sight of the importance of having a challenging and engaging curriculum that excites our students and creates or reinforces a life-long love of learning.

CURRICULUM ENHANCEMENTS

The 2012–2013 curriculum offerings demonstrate evidence of our continued commitment to technology-based curricular enhancements and support our major goals and key curriculum initiatives, which include the following:

- Increase curriculum quality as evidenced by increased user satisfaction and improved student academic performance.
- Increase curriculum customization and personalization.
- Differentiate curriculum via new proprietary content, tools, and resources.
- Enable increased implementation efficiencies and leverage new technologies.
- Support students' mastery of 21st-century student outcomes; the skills, knowledge, and expertise students should master to succeed in work and life in the 21st century.

You will find that the 2012–2013 courses offer the same detailed daily lessons, interactive online instructional resources, challenging assessments, and high-quality, up-to-date textbooks as those found in our current curriculum. You also will find innovative proprietary instructional resources, tools, and options designed to provide an engaging and personalized learning experience for students.

- *Lab Investigator: Dissection* enables students to watch certified biologists perform step-by-step dissections of various specimens and then perform virtual dissections on their own. Students can also research the specimens they are dissecting.
- *Digital Scale* provides students the opportunity to realistically determine the weight of objects, liquids, and powders. Students select various containers and materials to measure such as graduated cylinders, beakers, gold, lead, uranium, sodium, aluminum foil, table sugar, aluminum nails, pennies, and water.
- Expanded *Activity Tracker* provides a fun, interactive tool for students to track and time their physical fitness activities, independent reading, math practice, or speech therapy activities. This personal information may be stored, used to generate progress charts, or exported for submission to teachers.
- *Grammar Game* tool supports students' mastery of Common Core State



Standards as students analyze, build, and create sentences to navigate the complexities of grammar, syntax, and punctuation.

- *Connector* presents students an online interactive yearbook. Featuring student photos and information, photos of school events and faculty/staff photos, and the ability to virtually sign one another's yearbook, students connect with fellow students and share school year experiences.
- New math *Teachlet® Tutorials* provide middle school students interactive instructional modules to help students understand challenging mathematics skills and concepts in fresh and engaging ways.



A summary of the new curricular offerings is presented below and the entire breadth and depth of the curriculum is provided in the *2012–2013 Program Guide*, which showcases the amazing depth and breadth of content, interactive instructional activities, and assessments available to your families.

WHAT'S NEW IN THE ELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE GRADES (K–8)?

- Elementary State Histories incorporate the IEXCEL instructional sequence as students inquire, explore, connect, communicate, collaborate, evaluate, and link to state-specific data and information. Multimedia presentations and online tools, including the Guild of Inquisitive Robots, Google Earth, and interactive timelines engage students in an exciting exploration of their state. New courses for 2012–2013 include Florida, Pennsylvania, Georgia, and California.
- K–5 Language Arts course enhancements focus on fundamentals of grammar rules and usage. Pearson's *Grammar Jammers* engage students in direct instruction and opportunities to apply knowledge while viewing animated videos.
- Grade 3 Language Arts course enhancements support students' development of reading fluency through the integration of student-recorded readings. Students practice their reading fluency by using the audio record tool to record their oral readings of passages and text selections.
- Elementary and Middle School Chinese II elective courses build on students' learning of Mandarin Chinese from their level I courses where they engaged in cultural explorations, storytelling, and conversations with native Chinese speakers.
- Elementary and Middle School Spanish I and II elective courses provide students with the same interactive components as the Chinese electives. Students are introduced to Spanish language and culture as they actively engage in viewing, listening, reading, and speaking activities.
- Grades K–8 Educational Technology and Online Learning courses engage students in technology education aligned to the most current National Educational Technology Standards (NETS) standards. Fully revised K–2 courses and updated K–8 technology tutorials provide students opportunities to learn and use technology skills purposefully to support their learning.

- Elementary and Middle School Music electives actively engage students in understanding, listening to, reading, and evaluating music and music performances. Designed on the national music standards, the music courses incorporate multimedia presentations, online tools, audio recordings, and interactive instructional activities to provide students the opportunity to learn music and share in musical experiences.
- Revised grade 6–8 Math courses support students’ learning of essential math skills. These courses are aligned to state and Common Core State Standards and include robust interactive instruction and practice, added rigor and relevance, discussion activities, and mid-unit reviews. Teaching guides provide teachers concept and lesson overviews, teaching tips, and resources for differentiation.
- Eastern and Western Hemisphere Social Studies courses provide middle school students with the opportunity to explore the countries and continents in the Eastern and Western Hemispheres. Core concepts such as climates and ecosystems, population and movement, government and citizenship, and culture and geography are explored as students learn about Canada, Middle America, South America, Europe and Russia, Africa, Asia, Australia and the Pacific.
- An Economics unit developed for middle school students focuses on the influence of unlimited wants and scarce resources on consumers, producers, and governments; interactions of markets and prices on a local and global level; influence of incentives on prices and consumer actions; and comparison and contrast of the roles of individuals, businesses, organizations, government, and other institutions in the economy.
- A Civics unit introduces middle school students to civics standards including the relationship of the United States to other nations and world affairs, civic life, politics and government, the foundations of the American political system, and the roles of citizens in American democracy.
- Revised grade 6–8 Language Arts courses incorporate extensions on grammar, vocabulary, reading skills, and student collaborative discussions, with enhanced assessments focused on higher order thinking skills. The grade 8 courses present increased alignment between writing and grammar, including updated portfolios that reflect the writing process and *Writing with Power* resources and incorporation of the new interactive *Grammar Game* tool.
- Revised grade 6–8 Social Studies courses incorporate interactive technology enhancements including Google Earth and a timeline tool, as well as increased alignment between objectives and assessments; and a refreshed instructional design.
- State-specific Social Studies courses provide direct instruction to middle school students on the state history or social studies content identified in state-specific standards, and includes Louisiana State History Grade 8, Georgia State History Grade 8, and Utah State History Grade 8.
- Revised grade 6–8 Science courses provide increased rigor and interactivity through enhanced interactive labs, added student-to-student discussions, revised relevant assessments, and a semester-long project.

- Middle School Physical Education courses incorporate a new secondary Yoga series. Thematic lessons focused on topics such as individualism, strength, global awareness, and diversity guide students through the learning and practice of Vinyasa Yoga.
- Connections Academy's ever-popular Home Life course series is enhanced with two exciting new additions: *Interactive Art* and *Pet Care*.
- A range of annual course revisions to improve and enhance existing courses include the following:
 - revisions to select portfolios, tests, and quizzes
 - integration of proprietary online tools and resources including *Teachlet® Tutorials*, *Activity Tracker*, *GrammarJammers*, and *Grammar Game tool*
 - expansion of our online practice tool to enhance the accountability and effectiveness of student practice work; this tool provides real-time visibility to students and teachers as to how students are mastering and completing their practice assignments
 - enhanced grade level and subject area offering for Skills for Success (Study Island)
 - increased deep linking directly to specific iText pages, providing students easier access to textbook content, as well as enhanced e-book software
- Connections Academy currently offers more than 20 elementary and middle school clubs and activities that provide students with increased live synchronous learning opportunities, increased presentation and competition opportunities, and increased student-to-student engagement. Clubs and Activities updates include exciting new lessons for Arts and Crafts, Science in the Kitchen, Quiz Bowl, and Brainteasers. Guest speakers, speaking on leadership and sharing subject matter expertise, will be sponsored throughout the year by the Student Leadership and Service Club. In addition, students will continue to have the opportunity to stay engaged through Summer Connections' LiveLesson® sessions, mini-newsletters, and student polls.
- The Curriculum and Instruction department continues to research and pilot cutting-edge online resources. The recently added MediaChalk™, Math-Whizz®, and DimensionU™ resources will continue to be offered to students during the 2012–2013 school year. In addition, several exciting new resources are scheduled to be piloted and/or made available to students including SkillsTutor™'s Math Fact Fluency and Study Island's AP Test Prep, ReadingEggs, Reading Eggspress, Education City, and ESL Reading Smart.

WHAT'S NEW IN HIGH SCHOOL (9–12)?

- In support of our overall math focus and six year course revision cycle, Algebra 2 (basic, standard, and honors) has been revised. The Algebra 2 courses include the integration of Pearson interactive instructional tools and resources such as

PowerAlgebra, as well as interactive videos and instructional activities, online practice and assessments, integration of the WorkPad tool, and writing in math activities. These courses are aligned to state and Common Core State Standards and provide increased interactivity, added rigor and relevance, and robust instruction. Teaching guides that provide overviews, teaching tips, and resources for differentiation are provided for teachers.

- Advanced Algebra with Financial Applications is a new high school math offering and includes units on saving, spending, debt, mortgage, investment, and retirement. Real-world applications include exponential growth, simple and compound interest, fixed and adjustable rates; stocks, bonds, and portfolios, and financial goal-setting.
- Revised Biology courses (basic, standard, and honors) are also a part of the six-year course revision and continuous improvement cycle. Developed in alignment with the Framework for K–12 Science Education, these courses focus on the crosscutting concepts and core ideas, and incorporate a variety of new virtual tools and labs, including *Lab Investigator: Dissection*, and ample opportunity for analysis and discussion. Teaching guides are included and provide teachers with overviews, teaching tips, and resources for differentiation.
- Forensic Science engages students in research methods that forensic scientists use to analyze a crime scene through research, discussions, and analysis. The course includes units on crime scene investigation, fingerprints, impressions and casts, hair and fiber evidence, entomology, and DNA. Students analyze evidence and draw appropriate conclusions based on the evidence.
- Anatomy and Physiology engages students in the levels of biological organization, from the cell to the organ system, and examines the general anatomy and physiology associated with the integumentary, skeletal, muscular, respiratory, circulatory, digestive, urinary, reproductive, immune, endocrine, and nervous systems. Students identify the latest research and medical advancements in each of the 11 systems as well as the potential careers associated with anatomy.
- AP Human Government provides college-level instruction on the patterns and processes that impact the way humans understand, use, and change Earth's surface. The course employs geographic models, methods, and tools to examine human social organization and its effect on the world in which we live, and asks students to examine spatial patterns and analyze the changing interconnections among people and places.
- State-specific Social Studies courses provide direct instruction to high school students on the state history or social studies content identified in state specific standards, and included Oklahoma State History Grade 9 and Arizona State History.
- Revised Music Appreciation elective actively engages students in understanding, listening to, reading, and evaluating music and music performances. Designed on the national music standards, the music course incorporates multimedia presentations, online tools, audio recordings, and interactive instructional activities as it provides students the opportunity to learn music and share in musical experiences.

- High School Physical Education courses incorporate a new secondary Yoga series. Thematic lessons focused on topics such as individualism, strength, global awareness, and diversity, guide students through the learning and practice of Vinyasa Yoga.
- A range of annual course revisions to improve and enhance existing courses, including the following:
 - updated alignment of textbook-based courses to textbooks for AP courses with complete companion iText
 - integration of proprietary online tools and resources to provide interactive, online activities and simulations that engage students and increase learning, including the *Lab Investigator: Dissection, Digital Scale, and Activity Tracker*
 - expansion of our online practice tool to enhance the accountability and effectiveness of student practice work; this tool provides real-time visibility to students and teachers as to how students are mastering and completing their practice assignments
 - continued implementation of iText only options for targeted 9–12 grade courses while maintaining the ability to offer both online and offline options, enabling each school to make its own decision based on their financial resources
 - revisions to select portfolios, tests, and quizzes
 - enhanced grade level and subject area offering for Skills for Success (Study Island)
- Enhancement of Connections Academy’s current 18 high school clubs and activities to provide students with increased live synchronous learning opportunities, increased presentation and competition opportunities, and increased student-to-student engagement. Clubs and Activities updates include exciting new lessons for Quiz Bowl and Brainteasers. Guest speakers, speaking on leadership and sharing subject matter expertise, will be sponsored throughout the year by the Student Leadership and Service Club. In addition, students will continue to have the opportunity to stay engaged through Summer Connections’ LiveLesson® sessions, mini-newsletters, and student polls.
- The Curriculum and Instruction department continues to research and pilot cutting-edge online resources. The recently added MediaChalk™, Math-Whizz®, and DimensionU™ resources will continue to be offered to students during the 2012–2013 school year. In addition, several exciting new resources are scheduled to be piloted and/or made available to students including SkillsTutor™’s Math Fact Fluency and Study Island’s AP Test Prep, Education City, and ESL Reading Smart.

Connections Education is also excited to announce the development of three new special academies for students with exceptional talents. Starting in 2012–2013, students who have demonstrated talent in the areas of sports, performing arts, or STEM will have the opportunity to apply to one of three specialty academies dedicated to fostering growth in these disciplines. The academies will offer specialized course offerings, enriched club and activity experiences, networking, competitive, and scholarship opportunities, and opportunities to meet and learn from experts in the field. For students who excel in theatre, music, dance, or sports, or who have a significant interest in science, technology, engineering, or mathematics, these specialized academies will provide unique opportunities to cultivate their talents and enrich their academic lives.

In addition to the curriculum efforts detailed above and in the *2012–2013 Program Guide*, significant efforts are underway to address the accessibility of Connections Academy content for all students, and to address the portability and tablet compatibility of courses and instructional resources. Connections Education is committed to serving students with disabilities who are enrolled in our schools and to providing them access to the Connexus® education platforms and content. With this in mind, we are committed to adhering to the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines Version 2.0 Level AA and the Section 508 Technical Standards. We have made great progress and continue to work to ensure content in Connections Education courses is accessible to all learners in a variety of ways. Our personalized instruction includes text readers, closed captioning, or illustrative scripts, as well as a 1-800 accessibility support help desk number where students and families can call for support. In regard to content portability and tablet compatibility, Connections Education has developed a multi-year plan to provide courses, instructional resources, and iText that are tablet and iPad compatible. This plan includes a phased approach to providing iText that are supported on tablets and iPads, the conversion of instructional content and resources to a format that is compatible across platforms and browsers, and the support of browsers and platforms that support this functionality.

The Future

We believe that the introduction of tablet computing is going to fundamentally change the educational landscape. While we do not believe tablets are a substitute for computers for students in a virtual school program, we do believe they will have profound implications for students as a replacement for traditional printed textbooks. We understand the current resistance to viewing a textbook online due to the fact that it is not portable, students can't take it places where there is not an Internet connection, and it may be harder for some students to read text on the screen versus a book on their lap. However, it is very different to experience an interactive textbook on a tablet, as they are portable, you can use them even when not connected to the Internet, and you can hold them on your lap while reading just like a book but with more powerful features.

While we are excited about this direction, the transition will not be easy as there are different tablet operating systems that have profound differences in their business models. Apple's iPad has been designed to require as much revenue as possible go through Apple and thereby eliminating support for Flash, which is the content creation and delivery tool that has been used by many popular educational content developers. For example, all of

the Connections Teachlet® tutorials and our powerful Lab Investigator series were written in Flash. The BrainPop® videos are all in Flash as is much of the content from other third-party providers. Despite what you may have heard, HTML5 is not a seamless replacement for Flash and there are considerable conversion costs. There are tablets available that do support Flash, of which the most popular are those using the Android operating system. However even with these, there are changes that must be made for content to display properly on a tablet, and Adobe, the producer of Flash, has indicated they will no longer upgrade Flash to support mobile platforms. As a result, as the non-iPad tablet operating systems evolve, content written in the current versions of Flash will no longer be supported.

Connections Education wants to be prepared for what is coming and has developed a three-year plan to ensure that all of its content will work on both iPads and Android-based tablets in time for the 2014–2015 school year. We hope to have high school ready to support tablets even earlier, in time for the 2013–2014 school year. Next fall, we will be discussing this plan and its implications with all of our partners in more detail in order to gain your input, answer your questions, and address your concerns. It is clear that there are exciting times ahead.

A Historical Perspective: 2002–2003 through 2011–2012

Connections Academy continues to expand and improve our product offering based on direct feedback from all of our stakeholders. Below is a summary of some of the changes and improvements that have occurred since our first school year.

2002–2003: In our first school year, grades K–8 were offered, and primarily used Calvert School curriculum with some modifications to support state alignments. Assessment occurred every 20 days and covered all courses in one test. Clubs and Activities were introduced for elementary and middle school students.

2003–2004: Connections Academy completely relaunched all Calvert lessons into the new Learning Management System, re-engineered with Microsoft's .NET framework. This was accompanied by an approximately 30 percent expansion of Connections Academy-generated content to improve state alignments and enrich content with Web-based lesson enhancements. New course-specific online assessments were introduced, allowing faster teacher feedback and integration into a Web-based grade book. Calvert's handwriting approach was replaced with the nationally recognized Zaner-Bloser handwriting program. A hands-on science kit was included. Other additions included the Take Me to Your Readers program for grades K–2, new Zaner-Bloser spelling for grades 2–7, a Physical Education course, the introduction of a test preparation course, the incorporation of BrainPOP® multimedia content to enhance lessons, the addition of the World Book resource, and the introduction of the Journey North group interactive project. The program continued to serve K–8.

2004–2005: A new K–8 music program was introduced, and Teachlet® online, interactive tutorials and *unitedstreaming* multimedia content were integrated into lessons. Pre-printed lesson manuals for all K–8 core subjects were provided. Other additions included Skills Builder for enrichment and remediation and the introduction of the Home Life course. The program continued to serve grades K–8.

2005–2006: Ninth grade core courses were added, including a first-level high school Spanish course. Our program was further augmented by graded online discussions for high school courses, a revision and expansion of the test preparation program, and Hooked on Phonics™. This school year also saw the introduction of LiveLesson® sessions, the teacher-led synchronous online instruction for remedial students, and the addition of French, Latin, and German language instruction for grades 1–4. The program received CITA (Commission on International and Trans-Regional Accreditation) accreditation this school year.



2006–2007: Tenth grade core courses were added in addition to several new high school electives. Completely new seventh and eighth grade Social Studies, Language Arts, and Science courses were added based on 2006–2007 textbook editions and included iText (electronic textbooks) links within the lessons. Middle school Spanish, French, and German language courses were added, and the PACE (Program for All Children to Excel) was introduced for students struggling with basic literacy and numeracy. The trial adoption of the Study Island test preparation program began, and LiveLesson® sessions were expanded for middle school and high school students. Hooked on Math™ was added, and the technology literacy program was expanded to provide a separate course for each grade level. New Social Studies courses in first and second grades and two new Home Life modules were offered. New art cards for the History of Painting elective were introduced, and the provision of science kits was expanded to all K–8 science courses. Foreign language offerings expanded to add two more levels of elementary French and German, and more clubs were added for a total of six for elementary, middle school, and high school. A new WebQuest group interaction project was rolled out, and an online, interactive virtual scientific calculator and virtual scientific lab experiments were introduced.

2007–2008: Eleventh grade courses were included and high school electives were further expanded to include opportunities for independent study and career preparation. The use of LiveLesson® sessions continued to grow. A math and reading gifted program for grades 3–8 was introduced, as well as basic and honors courses in high school. Eight Advanced Placement courses were added to the high school offering. The Study Island test preparation program was fully adopted with state-specific content. New language instruction included a Mandarin Chinese offering, and high school courses included French, German, Latin, and an expanded Spanish program. All foreign language courses were upgraded to include audio. A total of nine clubs and activities were offered for high school, and at least eleven were offered for elementary and middle school. Two new Home Life modules were added to the course, completely new middle school Art and Physical Education courses were rolled out, and a new WebQuest group interaction project (Frog and Toad Watch) was introduced. Also, BrainPOP Jr.® and BrainPOP® content in Spanish became available to students.

2008–2009: The big news for 2008–09 was the introduction of 12th grade and the resulting completion of a comprehensive K–12 curriculum. Core courses for grades three, four, five, and six were completely redone with new textbooks, course guides, workbooks, and Teachlet® tutorials. Kindergarten went through a substantial expansion and enhancement. A new hands-on elementary school Art program (grades 3–6) and a new Yoga program that is unique to Connections Academy were all introduced. Grolier Online™'s full suite of online databases was made available to all students. For the high

school program, in addition to the regular 12th grade courses, 18 Advanced Placement courses were offered taught by Connections Academy's best teachers selected from our 14 schools. Exciting new electives included Speech and Debate, Music Appreciation, Sign Language, Digital Photography, Computer Programming (I and II), and Driver's Education. Of course, with 12th grade came SAT and ACT preparation courses, commencement ceremonies, class rings, and other graduation-related activities. As we do every year, there were literally hundreds of small and not-so-small enhancements made to the Learning Management System. Of special note for this year is the completely new grade book functionality that allows teachers to view their entire class and even do basic analysis on performance patterns.

2009–2010: The major initiative for 2009–2010 year was the implementation of a completely new and improved first and second grade curriculum. These courses were developed from the ground up using the latest textbooks and other instructional resources from Scott-Foresman, McGraw-Hill, and Zaner-Bloser. These courses used the same age-appropriate course features developed for the upper elementary grades, along with the unique Learning Coach view that provides specific instructions and assistance both online and in a printed Course Guide. All kindergarten courses were further enhanced to include additional lesson content, improved standards alignment, and more online, interactive activities. New 4th and 5th grade Art and Physical Education courses, as well as new 3–5 Gifted and Talented Science courses and Sign Language courses were developed and implemented. High school enhancements included the addition of Japanese I and II, and the expansion of Spanish and French to include Level IV. Basic, standard, and honors English 10 courses were completely rebuilt, along with basic versions for Algebra 1, Biology, American Government, and Physical Science, and major revisions were made to Algebra 1 and Geometry. Understanding that some students need supplemental, targeted supports beyond the core curriculum, Headsprout®, Hooked on Phonics, and Raz-Kids™ for struggling readers; SkillsTutor™ for basic skill practice; Study Island to ensure mastery of each individual state's standards; and Hotmath.com to provide step-by-step answers to math homework programs were offered to students. Several enhancements to our LMS and curriculum were designed and implemented to uphold and enforce the principles of academic integrity. These academic integrity efforts included the availability of anti-plagiarism software for students and teachers to automatically scan work for evidence of plagiarism and the requirement for students to complete assessments in order by limiting the ability to view upcoming assessments until previous assessments have been submitted.

2010–2011: The 2010–2011 school year brought significant enhancements to our curriculum and instruction offering. In addition to newly developed proprietary core courses, modifications have been made to the majority of our K–12 offerings. These modifications target increased interactivity and opportunities for student engagement, assessment of student learning, and closer alignment to state and national standards. New multimedia instructional tools and resources were provided to students and teachers including our proprietary virtual rock and mineral kit (*Lab Investigator: Rocks and Minerals*), math *WorkPad*, and vocabulary flash cards, as well as the introduction of online practice activities and e-books. The addition of new elective and club offerings and high school alternative novel units increased the personalization offerings we are able to provide students.

2011–2012: The 2011–2012 curriculum offerings demonstrated evidence of our continued commitment to student learning and to technology-based curricular enhancements as we continued to increase the depth and breadth of content, interactive instructional activities, and assessments available to students. With a major focus on math performance, revised and enhanced 3–8 Math courses were offered in addition to the new Essential Math courses. Revised GT Math 7 (Algebra 1) and GT Math 8 (Geometry) were provided, as well as PreAlgebra, Algebra 1 (basic, standard, and honors), and Geometry (basic, standard, and honors). In Language Arts, new 6–8 alternative novel units were provided, as well as new English 10, 11, and 12 (basic, standard, and honors). The 6 Trait Power Write® program was implemented to support grade 3–12 students in the writing process. New grade 6–8 GT Science courses were offered to extend our grade 3–5 offerings. Revised Physical Science, U.S. History courses (basic, standard, and honors), Basic World History, and Basic Earth Science were also offered. Additional state histories were offered including Louisiana, Utah, and Oklahoma. New K–8 electives included Digital Arts, and Entrepreneurship for 6–8, Gifted and Talented Literature Study 2, and Elementary and Middle School Chinese I. A series of high school electives were added including Entrepreneurship, Marketing, 3D Art I and Digital Arts I, Engineering Design I, Web Design I and II, Game Design, Earth Space Science, Marine Science, Critical Thinking and Study Skills, Life Management Skill, Sign Language II, and Chinese III. The integration of proprietary online tools and resources included *Lab Investigator: Chemical Reactions*, *WorkPad*, *Activity Tracker*, *Virtual Geoboard*, *Virtual 2-D/3-D Shapes* tool, *Virtual Spring Scale*, *Flash Cards*, and e-book software. The expansion of our online practice tool provided real-time visibility to students and teachers as to how students were mastering and completing their practice assignments. New supplemental online resources included MediaChalk™, Math-Whizz®, and DimensionU™, and new student clubs included Brainteaser and Digital Storytelling.

This historical overview does not include the many daily, weekly, and yearly updates to our courses based on suggestions from parents, students, and teachers, as well as our continuing modification of lessons based on students' test score performance and changing state standards. While bearing little resemblance to the curriculum we introduced ten years ago, our current expansive course offerings demonstrate our continued commitment to our student and schools, and to passing on our increasing buying power and continual investment in our program to you.

We hope you will take the opportunity to carefully read the *2012–2013 Program Guide* and explore all that these newest course offerings and enhancements offer our students. Let us know if you have any questions. As always, we look forward to discussing this further with you.

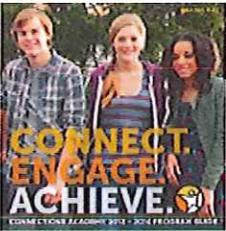
TO: Connections Academy and Nexus Academy School Boards
State/District Partners

FROM: Patricia Hoge, Senior Vice President of Curriculum and Instruction
and Chief Academic Officer

SUBJECT: Introduction of the 2013–2014 Curriculum and Instructional Program

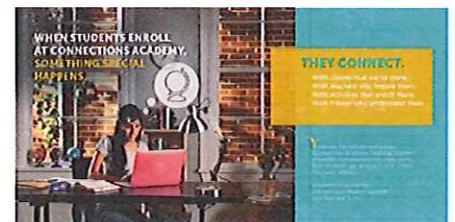
DATE: March 5, 2013

CC: Barbara Dreyer, President
Steven Guttentag, Chief Education Officer
VPs and Directors of Schools
Connections Academy and Nexus Academy School Principals



As we prepare for the 2013–14 school year, our curriculum and instruction efforts are more focused than ever on helping students achieve their best in a learning environment focused on innovation, personalized instruction, and continuous improvement. The adoption and implementation of the Common Core State Standards have caused us to closely examine the rigor and relevance of our curriculum and to ensure that any curriculum improvements and new offerings we provide support students on their path to college and career readiness. It is essential that as we revise, maintain, and expand our K–12 curriculum that we work to equip students with the skills, knowledge, and experiences needed to succeed in work and life in the 21st century. More than ever before, our 2013–2014 curriculum offerings provide individual schools with the ability to differentiate and customize to enable the overall offering to better fit each student population, state requirements, and funding considerations. As always, these decisions are based on feedback from our families, our boards, and our teachers.

We continue to learn and benefit from being a part of the Pearson family. As the world’s leading learning company, Pearson provides Connections’ curriculum and instructional services teams with significant opportunities to learn and benefit from their expertise in curriculum development, assessment and instruction, research, and teacher professional development. These collaborations have enabled the expansion and creation of even more robust online offerings for our students, focused on increased interactivity and opportunities for student-to-student interaction, differentiated and higher order learning activities, and increased alignment to state and national standards. The *2013–2014 Connections Academy Program Guide* contains a detailed overview of the instructional program, courses, and curriculum materials and resources.



CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT AND STUDENT PERFORMANCE

Connections Academy continues to employ a team of experienced and talented curriculum development and production specialists, curriculum project managers, content and copy editors, multimedia and instructional designers, and quality assurance specialists. These individuals apply their deep expertise in online instruction and academic disciplines to the development of curriculum that supports 21st century readiness for every student. In addition, our Connections Academy teachers and Teacher Course Liaisons play an essential role in the development, implementation, and maintenance of our high quality curriculum and instruction (see section below on the role of teacher review in the curriculum development process). This collaboration between teachers and development teams ensures that feedback from the daily implementation of the curriculum, and from student performance, informs the curriculum development, maintenance, and revision processes.

Last year, we introduced new functionality within our curriculum management system that enables the reordering of curriculum units within and between courses to ensure the sequence of instruction aligns to state specific expectations and testing cycles. This functionality resulted in the reordering of units in more than 100 courses for 2012–2013 based on schools’ prioritized requests. We are again in the process of identifying schools’ needs to reorder curriculum units and will provide hundreds of customized courses based on school specific requests and needs.

Throughout the 2012–13 school year, all members of our school and curriculum and instruction leadership teams have been focused on decision making and practices that are consistent with our belief statement regarding student learning. As a highly engaged professional learning community (PLC), we believe that:

All students can learn and must learn at relatively high levels of achievement, and that it is our job to create an environment that results in this high level of performance. We are confident that, with our support and help, students can master challenging academic material, and we expect them to do so. We are prepared to work collaboratively with colleagues, students, and parents to achieve this shared educational purpose.

This belief statement has guided and informed our hiring and professional development, as well as our instructional practices and decision making. We have adopted Timothy D. Kanold’s philosophy that “a well-disciplined PLC realizes there are two primary types of accountability and celebration targets.”

1. Accountability for and celebration of *improved student results*
2. Accountability for and celebration of stakeholder actions toward the shared vision of the school (*accountability to action*)¹

¹ Timothy D. Kanold: *The Five Disciplines of PLC Leaders*

This focus on student achievement and accountability reflects Pearson's focus on efficacy, and assurance that their programs have a positive effect on learning. Our evaluation system consists of both formative and summative measures to determine the value and effectiveness of our curriculum offerings. This multilevel evaluation system incorporates regular reviews of student performance results, user feedback, assessment performance analysis, and district, state, and national content standards and course requirements. Feedback is collected daily through our StarTrack system, EMS feedback tool, our annual Parent Satisfaction survey, and from conversations and comments made by our board members. Our commitment to accountability and continuous improvement continues to be displayed in the latest 2012–2013 StarTrack lesson ratings from students, teachers, and Learning Coaches, as well as in our 2011–2012 AP, SAT, ACT, and State Testing exam performance.

Star Track Lesson/Course Ratings – March 2013 (2012–2013 School Year to date)

- Total ratings – 573,600
- Total ratings with comments – 23,424
- Average rating – 4.16 (5-point scale)

AP Exam Scores (2011–2012 scores reported on a 5-point scale)

- National AP Performance Scores
 - 59.3% scored 3–5 (3 = Qualified, 4 = Well Qualified, 5 = Extremely Well Qualified)
- Connections Academy students
 - 50.2% scored 3–5 (3 = Qualified, 4 = Well Qualified, 5 = Extremely Well Qualified)
 - 13.1% scored 5
 - 16.9% scored 4
 - Connection Academy had a 99.4% increase in the number of students who took AP courses from 2010–11 to 2011–12
 - Connections Academy had a 116% increase in the number of students who took AP exams from 2010–11 to 2011–12.
 - Our overall numbers still remain lower than we would like and our schools are being encouraged to promote AP courses to their students.

SAT and ACT 2011–12

- National average composite score – 21.1
- Connections Academy students' average composite score – 22

SAT

- CA average critical reading 524 (national average 496)
- CA average math score 484 (national average 514)
- CA average writing score 489 (national average 488)

- CA average combined score 1495 (national average 1498)

State Testing

- In 2011–12, Connections scored equivalent to or higher than corresponding statewide Reading performance in 77/120 tested grades (72.5% of all grade levels tested across all Connections schools in all states). The corresponding percentages for Math are 11% (which remains our highest priority for improvement), 50% for Science, and 48% for Writing.
- Compared to similar students working in a like environment (i.e., our closest national competitor), in 2011–12 Connections scored equivalent to or higher than 92.0% of tested grades in Math, 91.0% of tested grades in Reading, 96.0% of tested grades in Science, and 91.0% of tested grades in Writing.

While we consistently outperform other full-time virtual schools and are pleased with the progress we have made, there is much work for us still to do. We continue to have high levels of students who are not proficient on their state exams, particularly in math and writing, and we want more of our students taking AP courses and going on to college. All of this continues to demand and receive our attention.

In support of our continued and dedicated focus on student learning, we have deepened our reflection, discussions, and analysis of student learning through increased system functionality, enhanced data reporting tools, and expanded professional development opportunities. We continue to focus on the development of tools, reports, and functionality to empower our teachers to make data-driven decisions regarding student learning. To ensure students' mastery of required standards, we have continued to evolve our instructional model and enhanced the functionality of Connexus®, our education management system (EMS). As a result of the direct tagging of individual lessons and assessment items to state, national, and Common Core State Standards, teachers, students, and parents now have access to real-time data on student performance against learning objectives. Our new Assessment Objective Performance Report, available from the student Grade Book, provides a detailed report of individual student performance on essential language arts and math skills and standards. In addition, a newly enhanced feature of Connexus®, the Intervention Indicators, displays to teachers their students' likelihood of successful mastery of state standards and proficiency on state testing. This increased access and powerful functionality serves to inform and guide teachers' instructional practices and interventions. We have also introduced an Explore Your Courses course for teachers to provide opportunities for deep exploration of the instructional design, content, and resources of the courses they teach.

- *Kindergartent avatars and interactive practice activities* that actively engage our youngest students in the learning process. Characters such as the language arts lion, math ladybug, and science gator, introduce and support the new Ready, Learn, Do kindergarten sequence of instruction.



- *Imbedded interactives* provide students engaging, multimedia practice activities and immediate feedback on understanding and learning.
- Our new *Virtual Instrument* and *Virtual Xylophone*, incorporated within the Juilliard e-learning courses, provide students opportunities to apply their learning through practice and performance.



- This year's *Connector* yearbook presents students with an online interactive yearbook featuring student photos and information, photos of school events and faculty/staff photos, and the ability to virtually sign one another's yearbook.

A summary of the new curricular offerings is presented below and the entire breadth and depth of the curriculum is provided in the *2013–2014 Program Guide*, which showcases the amazing range and scope of content, interactive instructional activities, and assessments available to your families.

WHAT'S NEW IN THE ELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE GRADES (K–8)?

- A completely new and robust Kindergarten program actively engages students in a Ready, Learn, Do instructional sequence throughout their language arts, math, science, social studies, art, and physical fitness courses. Animated avatars, such as Gator the alligator, introduce and reinforce essential skills and standards, while new interactive lesson activities provide frequent opportunities for student practice and engaged learning. Instructional tools and resources, including *BrainPOP Jr.*®, *Google Earth*, *Grammar Jammers*, and our proprietary *Activity Tracker*, *Connect-a-Majig*, *Virtual 2-D/3-D Shapes*, and *Virtual Geoboard* actively engage students in all aspects of the learning process. Incorporation of the *Reading Street* reading series and *enVisionMATH* mathematics series provides a smooth transition for students to first grade. New functionality within the *Connexus*® education management system enables the Learning Coach Guide to



be easily accessed from the student lesson page, enabling Learning Coaches and students to easily engage together in the students' instructional activities.

- To support Connections Academy's California schools, a Transitional Kindergarten program extends the new Kindergarten program over two years, enabling younger students to successfully transition from their preschool programs to full day Kindergarten.
- Grade 1–5 Language Arts course enhancements focus on the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). To increase alignment to the standards and address the instructional shifts presented by the CCSS, students have increased opportunities to build academic vocabulary, engage with a balance of literary and informational text, build knowledge in the disciplines, provide text-based answers, and write from multiple sources.
- Grade 1–5 Mathematics course enhancements also focus on the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). To more fully address the fundamental instructional shifts presented by the CCSS, additional practice and learning activities support students in increasing their math fluency, gaining a deeper understanding of mathematical concepts and practices, and applying their learning to new and relevant settings.
- Elementary State History courses continue to be revised and built to incorporate the IEXCEL instructional sequence. Students inquire, explore, connect, communicate, collaborate, evaluate, and link to state-specific data and information. Multimedia presentations and online tools, including the Guild of Inquisitive Robots, Google Earth, and interactive timelines engage students in an exciting exploration of their state. New courses for 2013–2014 include state histories for Indiana, Michigan, New Mexico, Ohio, and Oregon.
- New Middle School Science courses were inspired by state standards and the foundations of the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS), which focus on science and engineering practices, disciplinary core ideas, and crosscutting concepts. In the spirit of the NGSS and in accordance with 21st century skills, the new media-rich state specific science courses enable students to engage actively in inquiry-based investigations in Earth, life, and physical science, and STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) projects, as well as cross-disciplinary and cross-curricular activities. Students make connections, collaborate, and reflect on their learning as they work through the content and engage with interactive resources such as *Lab Investigator: Rocks and Minerals*, *Lab Investigator: Virtual Dissection*, *the Virtual Digital Scale*, and *the Virtual Spring Scale*.
- New Middle School Science GT modules provide gifted and talented students increased opportunities for inquiry-based investigations. Students investigate and understand more complex ideas as they engage in real life problem-solving activities presented as project-based learning experiences.

- State-specific Social Studies courses provide direct instruction to middle school students on the social studies content identified in state specific standards, and include enhancement of Eastern and Western Hemisphere study for South Carolina, Indiana, and Wisconsin students.
- New Middle School Health and Physical Education courses present students the opportunity to determine their current personal fitness levels and to learn to improve those levels. Students also learn safety rules for exercise, how to create equipment from household items, how different activities target different body parts, how to set and reach a goal, and how to be good sports. Activity choices are plentiful, leading students to a healthy and physically active lifestyle. Students keep a log of physical fitness activities so they can monitor and reflect on personal progress.
- New K–8 Educational Technology and Online Learning courses engage students in technology education aligned to the most current National Educational Technology Standards (NETS) standards. Fully revised courses and updated K–8 technology tutorials provide students opportunities to learn and use technology skills purposefully to support their learning.
- New K–8 music courses offer elementary and middle school students music and cultural arts instruction developed with the renowned Juilliard School, one of the world’s leading performing arts conservatories. Juilliard’s renowned scholars, composers, musicians, and instructors have worked closely with us to develop inspiring music courses. Lessons give students a strong foundation in music theory and composition, as well as a solid introduction to Western classical music. Interactive tools help students immerse fully in music. Musical concepts and techniques are reinforced with demonstrations, recordings, and video performances by Juilliard faculty, students, and alumni. With both offline and online resources, students receive a rich and well-rounded music learning experience in the new *Experiencing Music*, *Discovering Music*, and *Exploring Music* courses.
- Connections Academy’s ever-popular Home Life elective course is enhanced with exciting new additions including photography, textiles, and clothing.
- A range of annual course maintenance and revisions to improve and enhance existing courses include revisions to select portfolios, tests, and quizzes.
- Connections Academy currently offers more than 20 elementary and middle school clubs and activities that provide students with increased live synchronous learning opportunities, increased presentation and competition opportunities, and increased student-to-student engagement. Clubs and Activities updates include exciting new clubs, such as Music, Movie, Sports, Theater Arts, Career, and Gaming and Computer Technology, as well as lesson updates for Arts and Crafts, Science in the Kitchen, Quiz Bowl, and Brainteasers. Guest speakers, speaking on leadership and sharing subject matter expertise, will continue to be sponsored throughout the year by the Student Leadership and Service Club. In addition,

students will continue to have the opportunity to stay engaged through Summer Connections' LiveLesson® sessions, mini-newsletters, and student polls.

- The Curriculum and Instruction department continues to research and pilot cutting-edge online resources. The recently added *Reading Eggs*, *Reading Eggspress*, *SuccessMaker® Reading*, and *SuccessMaker® Math* resources will continue to be offered to students during the 2013–2014 school year. In addition, several exciting new resources are being piloted including *Write to Learn*, a summary and essay writing program that provides real-time, automated feedback to students and *Turnitin*'s robust plagiarism checker technology for teachers and students.

WHAT'S NEW IN THE HIGH SCHOOL GRADES (9–12)?

- As part of our ongoing commitment to helping all students prepare for post-high school success, 21 new career technical education (CTE) courses will be offered to our high school students. Programs of study are organized by career cluster and career pathway. Each cluster, along with its coordinating pathway, represents a distinct grouping of occupations and industries. Students gain the technical knowledge and skills training—supplemented by a strong academic foundation and real world experience—to navigate their way to a high-demand career or facilitate their transition to college. New CTE offerings include such diverse courses as Introduction to Homeland Security, Introduction to Medical Assisting, Introduction to Business, and Introduction to Sociology. Please refer to the *2013–14 Program Guide* for the full course list and descriptions.
- In addition to the CTE courses, two courses leading to industry certification will now be offered to students.
 - Learning Microsoft® Office® 2010 teaches students the fundamental Microsoft Office skills they need to succeed in the classroom, at home, and on the job. Designed to engage students with numerous hands-on projects that build skills and computer confidence, the course includes coverage of Word®, Excel®, Access®, and PowerPoint® and prepares students for the Microsoft Office Specialist Certification.
 - Computer Literacy for IC3 aligns with the Internet and Computing Core Certification (IC3). This certification is for users who want to demonstrate critical computer and Internet skills valued in today's academic and professional environments. The Computer Literacy for IC3 course is written to meet the certification standards and provide students with a broad understanding of the key components of computer literacy in order to prepare for the exam's three units: Unit 1: Computing Fundamentals (computer concepts), Unit 2: Using Productivity Software, and Unit 3: Living Online (the Internet).

- For students who need additional time and support mastering Algebra 1 and 2 skills and concepts, Part 1 and Part 2 courses provide year-long versions of traditional Algebra 1 and 2 semester courses. Supported by select state departments of education, students in these states are provided additional interactive practice, scaffolding, and support as they learn and acquire algebra skills and concepts over an extended time period.
- High School English 10 and 11 revisions and enhancements focus on the rigor and instructional shifts of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and accessibility of instructional resources. English 10 content and assignment revisions and updates present students increased opportunities to engage with a balance of literary and informational text, provide text-based answers, and write from multiple sources. English 11 enhancements provide students an online option for access to core novels and text.
- Arizona State History, a state-specific Social Studies course, provides direct instruction to high school students on the state history or social studies content identified in state specific standards.
- The new Sports Management Course introduces students to the fast-growing field of sports management. They explore topics such as sports marketing, branding, ticket sales, public relations, broadcasting, and breaking into the business of sports management. Students also learn the role of sports in society and the importance of an ethical approach to sports management.
- The new *Living Music* course offers high school students music and cultural arts instruction developed with the renowned Juilliard School, one of the world's leading performing arts conservatories. Juilliard's renowned scholars, composers, musicians, and instructors have worked closely with us to develop inspiring music courses. This course is designed to teach students fundamental musicianship skills from a Western classical approach, while aligning to national music education standards. Students are challenged to improve their listening, notation, analysis, performance, and improvisation skills. Audio, visual, and interactive technologies help students immerse fully in music. Musical concepts and techniques are reinforced with demonstrations, recordings, and video performances by Juilliard faculty, students, and alumni. With both offline and online resources, students receive a rich and well-rounded music learning experience.
- Connections Academy continues to offer more than 20 high school clubs and activities that provide students with increased live synchronous learning opportunities, increased presentation and competition opportunities, and increased student-to-student engagement. Clubs and Activities updates include exciting new clubs, such as Music, Movie, Sports, Theater Arts, Gaming and Computer Technology, as well as career focused First Generation and College Planning Clubs. Guest speakers, speaking on leadership and sharing subject matter expertise, will continue to be sponsored throughout the year by the Student Leadership and Service Club. In addition, students will continue to have the

opportunity to stay engaged through Summer Connections' LiveLesson® sessions, mini-newsletters, and student polls.

- The Curriculum and Instruction department continues to research and pilot cutting-edge online resources for our high school students. The recently added *MathXL®* and *Study Island's AP Test Prep* and *End of Course Exam* resources will continue to be offered to students during the 2013–2014 school year. In addition, several exciting new resources are being piloted including *Write to Learn*, a summary and essay writing program that provides real-time, automated feedback to students and *Turnitin's* robust plagiarism checker technology for teachers and students.
- In support of the new Nexus Academy blended instructional model, student study guides are being piloted during the 2012-13 school year in select courses. The anticipated goal is to finalize the format of the guides based on student and teacher feedback, and to develop and incorporate the guides into core courses for 2013-14.
- A range of annual course maintenance and revisions to improve and enhance existing courses include the following:
 - revisions to select portfolios, tests, and quizzes
 - expansion of our online practice tool to enhance the accountability and effectiveness of student practice work; this tool provides real-time visibility to students and teachers as to how students are mastering and completing their practice assignments

Teacher Involvement in Curriculum Development

While Connections uses specially trained curriculum developers to build its courses, teachers play an important role in the development process. We have found that the best way to leverage teacher involvement in curriculum has evolved over the years. While we have engaged teachers in the actual writing and reviewing of lessons, we have found that it is difficult to have teachers as the primary authors of online lessons due to the timing of course development and the late spring/early summer deadlines for course completion, the full-time commitment that is required, and the strict adherence to intellectual property restrictions, which are much more limiting for online courses which are distributed widely over the Internet than the expansive use of content that is available for teachers in the classroom.

However, we believe that teacher input to the overall course requirements as well as the “usability” of a course is essential. Therefore, several years ago, we created a special role called the “Teacher Course Liaison” (TCL). Teachers volunteer for this position which is tasked with coordinating input and feedback from all Connections teachers of the same course/s. The TCLs provide this input to the curriculum development and instruction teams regarding current courses, as well as new courses in development. Using our interactive “Issue Aware” (IA) system, the TCLs lead discussions with teachers as they

provide their suggestions on existing courses and on new courses throughout the development cycle. There were 25 TCL's this year, representing nine schools. In addition, over 900 teachers were stakeholders on the collaborative Issue Aware tickets. While teacher participation is not required, each Connections school is encouraged to obtain involvement by their teaching staff as TCL's and ensure they have teacher representation and active participation in each of the course IA's.

The Curriculum Advisory Committee

During the 2010-2011 and 2011-2012 school years, Connections implemented a Curriculum Advisory Committee (CAC) which was intended to have representation from all of its governing boards and other governing authorities along with its school leaders. Most schools did designate a participant; however the large number of participants limited direct input by all. While some CAC members wanted more involvement, many others found the amount of time required to attend the meetings to be impractical or in conflict with other commitments. As a result, we did not continue regularly scheduled meetings of the committee during the 2012-2013 school year. Despite the lack of formal CAC meetings, we have worked with many CAC members along with other governing board members to gain their input. The strong focus on the new career technical education (CTE) courses is a direct result of their requests. We will be contacting each of our governing boards and other governing authorities over the next several months to determine how we can assess their interest in participating in the curriculum planning process and other ways in which we can meet those needs.

The Future

In addition to the specific course enhancements planned for 2013–14, there are a number of initiatives underway that directly impact student, family, and teacher success. These multiyear initiatives support our commitment to student learning, quality, student and family satisfaction, and teacher effectiveness.

- Academic Integrity – we are committed to our mission of ensuring students achieve at the highest levels. In doing so, it is essential that we create and maintain an environment of academic honesty that serves as the foundation for students' success. As our Honor Code indicates, cheating, plagiarizing, or other acts of academic dishonesty are directly counter to the principles of academic excellence and harm most those students who engage in such activities since they cheat themselves out of the opportunity to fully develop their intellectual abilities. Our Honor Code serves to reinforce our commitment to academic excellence. Instructional supports are provided to students and families to assist in their learning of best practices to ensure students' work represents their own thinking and learning.

To further support this commitment, we are working to enhance tools, resources, and Connexus® functionality related to academic integrity. With enhancements to

the Connexus® Assessment Manager and with access to Pearson's robust assessment item banks, the ability to randomize assessment items will be available for 2013–14. Starting with middle and high school, unit tests and final exams will be presented as randomized item assessments in the areas of English language arts and math. Additional subject areas and grade levels will be prioritized for future development efforts. In addition, further Connexus® enhancements are being explored in the areas of item/test access, presentation, and functionality.

- Onboarding – Our goal for all students and families is to be fully onboarded prior to students starting their academic coursework and to set up a foundation for support and community that will continue throughout the year. This has proven challenging for some of our families, particularly those who enroll late, and has had a significant negative effect on success at Connections Academy and on student academic success. To support students' and families' successful transition to Connections Academy, a formal onboarding program has been recommended that would orient students and families to Connections Academy prior to the start of academic coursework. A pilot program is being conducted in three schools this school year in which late enrolling students are enrolled in a two day *Getting Started with Connections Academy* course prior to starting academic coursework, providing students and families dedicated time to complete training and orientations, to familiarize themselves with their courses and Connexus®, and to connect with their teachers. We are pleased with the initial feedback from families and teachers. Results of the pilot will inform plans for 2013–14.
- Specialty Academies – For middle and high school students who demonstrate expertise or competitive experience in the arts, sports, and science and technologies, we began offering our specialty academies this school year. The academies are providing students with activities that enrich the learning experience and provide rich networking opportunities to nurture their talents. We will continue to support the Performing Arts, Sports, and Science and Technology Academies with increasingly differentiated clubs, activities, and courses (e.g., STEM project based learning activities).
- Content Portability – We continue to implement curriculum design and development initiatives to address the portability of Connections Academy content. We continue to implement against our multiyear plan to provide courses, instructional resources, and iText that are tablet and iPad compatible, convert instructional content and resources to a format that is compatible across platforms and browsers, support the browsers and platforms that support this functionality, and engage all our partners in detail discussions in support of this plan.
- Accessibility – Significant efforts continue to address the accessibility of Connections Academy content for all students. Connections Education is committed to serving students with disabilities who are enrolled in our schools and to providing them access to the Connexus® education platforms and content.

With this in mind, we are committed to adhering to the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines Version 2.0 Level AA and the Section 508 Technical Standards. We have made great progress and continue to work to ensure content in Connections Academy courses is accessible to all learners in a variety of ways. Our personalized instruction includes text readers, closed captioning, or illustrative scripts, as well as a 1-800 accessibility support help desk number where students and families can call for support.

A Historical Perspective: 2002–2003 through 2012–2013

Connections Academy continues to expand and improve our product offering based on direct feedback from all of our stakeholders. Below is a summary of some of the changes and improvements that have occurred since our first school year.

2002–2003: In our first school year, grades K–8 were offered, and primarily used Calvert School curriculum with some modifications to support state alignments. Assessment occurred every 20 days and covered all courses in one test. Clubs and Activities were introduced for elementary and middle school students.

2003–2004: Connections Academy completely relaunched all Calvert lessons into the new Learning Management System, reengineered with Microsoft's .NET framework. This was accompanied by an approximately 30 percent expansion of Connections Academy-generated content to improve state alignments and enrich content with web-based lesson enhancements. New course-specific online assessments were introduced, allowing faster teacher feedback and integration into a web-based grade book. Calvert's handwriting approach was replaced with the nationally recognized Zaner-Bloser handwriting program. A hands-on science kit was included. Other additions included the Take Me to Your Readers program for grades K–2, new Zaner-Bloser spelling for grades 2–7, a Physical Education course, the introduction of a test preparation course, the incorporation of BrainPOP® multimedia content to enhance lessons, the addition of the World Book resource, and the introduction of the Journey North group interactive project. The program continued to serve K–8.

2004–2005: A new K–8 music program was introduced, and Teachlet® online, interactive tutorials and *unitedstreaming* multimedia content were integrated into lessons. Pre-printed lesson manuals for all K–8 core subjects were provided. Other additions included Skills Builder for enrichment and remediation and the introduction of the Home Life course. The program continued to serve grades K–8.

2005–2006: Ninth grade core courses were added, including a first-level high school Spanish course. Our program was further augmented by graded online discussions for high school courses, a revision and expansion of the test preparation program, and Hooked on Phonics™. This school year also saw the introduction of LiveLesson® sessions, the teacher-led synchronous online instruction for remedial students, and the



addition of French, Latin, and German language instruction for grades 1–4. The program received CITA (Commission on International and Trans-Regional Accreditation) accreditation this school year.

2006–2007: Tenth grade core courses were added in addition to several new high school electives. Completely new seventh and eighth grade Social Studies, Language Arts, and Science courses were added based on 2006–2007 textbook editions and included iText (electronic textbooks) links within the lessons. Middle school Spanish, French, and German language courses were added, and the PACE (Program for All Children to Excel) was introduced for students struggling with basic literacy and numeracy. The trial adoption of the Study Island test preparation program began, and LiveLesson® sessions were expanded for middle school and high school students. Hooked on Math™ was added, and the technology literacy program was expanded to provide a separate course for each grade level. New Social Studies courses in first and second grades and two new Home Life modules were offered. New art cards for the History of Painting elective were introduced, and the provision of science kits was expanded to all K–8 science courses. Foreign language offerings expanded to add two more levels of elementary French and German, and more clubs were added for a total of six for elementary, middle school, and high school. A new WebQuest group interaction project was rolled out, and an online, interactive virtual scientific calculator and virtual scientific lab experiments were introduced.

2007–2008: Eleventh grade courses were included and high school electives were further expanded to include opportunities for independent study and career preparation. The use of LiveLesson® sessions continued to grow. A Math and Reading gifted program for grades 3–8 was introduced, as well as basic and honors courses in high school. Eight Advanced Placement courses were added to the high school offering. The Study Island test preparation program was fully adopted with state-specific content. New language instruction included a Mandarin Chinese offering, and high school courses included French, German, Latin, and an expanded Spanish program. All foreign language courses were upgraded to include audio. A total of nine clubs and activities were offered for high school, and at least 11 were offered for elementary and middle school. Two new Home Life modules were added to the course, completely new middle school Art and Physical Education courses were rolled out, and a new WebQuest group interaction project (Frog and Toad Watch) was introduced. Also, BrainPOP Jr.® and BrainPOP® content in Spanish became available to students.

2008–2009: The big news for 2008–09 was the introduction of 12th grade and the resulting completion of a comprehensive K–12 curriculum. Core courses for grades three, four, five, and six were completely redone with new textbooks, course guides, workbooks, and Teachlet® tutorials. Kindergarten went through a substantial expansion and enhancement. A new hands-on elementary school Art program (grades 3–6) and a new Yoga program that is unique to Connections Academy were all introduced. Grolier Online™'s full suite of online databases was made available to all students. For the high school program, in addition to the regular 12th grade courses, 18 Advanced Placement courses were offered taught by Connections Academy's best teachers selected from our

14 schools. Exciting new electives included Speech and Debate, Music Appreciation, Sign Language, Digital Photography, Computer Programming (I and II), and Driver's Education. Of course, with 12th grade came SAT and ACT preparation courses, commencement ceremonies, class rings, and other graduation-related activities. As we do every year, there were literally hundreds of small and not-so-small enhancements made to the Learning Management System. Of special note for this year is the completely new grade book functionality that allows teachers to view their entire class and even do basic analysis on performance patterns.

2009–2010: The major initiative for 2009–2010 year was the implementation of a completely new and improved first and second grade curriculum. These courses were developed from the ground up using the latest textbooks and other instructional resources from Scott-Foresman, McGraw-Hill, and Zaner-Bloser. These courses used the same age-appropriate course features developed for the upper elementary grades, along with the unique Learning Coach view that provides specific instructions and assistance both online and in a printed Course Guide. All kindergarten courses were further enhanced to include additional lesson content, improved standards alignment, and more online, interactive activities. New 4th and 5th grade Art and Physical Education courses, as well as new 3–5 Gifted and Talented Science courses and Sign Language courses were developed and implemented. High school enhancements included the addition of Japanese I and II, and the expansion of Spanish and French to include Level IV. Basic, standard, and honors English 10 courses were completely rebuilt, along with basic versions for Algebra 1, Biology, American Government, and Physical Science, and major revisions were made to Algebra 1 and Geometry. Understanding that some students need supplemental, targeted supports beyond the core curriculum, Headsprout®, Hooked on Phonics, and Raz-Kids™ for struggling readers; SkillsTutor™ for basic skill practice; Study Island to ensure mastery of each individual state's standards; and Hotmath.com to provide step-by-step answers to math homework programs were offered to students. Several enhancements to our LMS and curriculum were designed and implemented to uphold and enforce the principles of academic integrity. These academic integrity efforts included the availability of anti-plagiarism software for students and teachers to automatically scan work for evidence of plagiarism and the requirement for students to complete assessments in order by limiting the ability to view upcoming assessments until previous assessments have been submitted.

2010–2011: The 2010–2011 school year brought significant enhancements to our curriculum and instruction offering. In addition to newly developed proprietary core courses, modifications have been made to the majority of our K–12 offerings. These modifications target increased interactivity and opportunities for student engagement, assessment of student learning, and closer alignment to state and national standards. New multimedia instructional tools and resources were provided to students and teachers including our proprietary virtual rock and mineral kit (*Lab Investigator: Rocks and Minerals*), math *WorkPad*, and vocabulary flash cards, as well as the introduction of online practice activities and e-books. The addition of new elective and club offerings and high school alternative novel units increased the personalization offerings we are able to provide students.

2011–2012: The 2011–2012 curriculum offerings demonstrated evidence of our continued commitment to student learning and to technology-based curricular enhancements as we continued to increase the depth and breadth of content, interactive instructional activities, and assessments available to students. With a major focus on math performance, revised and enhanced 3–8 Math courses were offered in addition to the new Essential Math courses. Revised GT Math 7 (Algebra 1) and GT Math 8 (Geometry) were provided, as well as Pre-Algebra, Algebra 1 (basic, standard, and honors), and Geometry (basic, standard, and honors). In Language Arts, new 6–8 alternative novel units were provided, as well as new English 10, 11, and 12 (basic, standard, and honors). The 6 Trait Power Write® program was implemented to support grade 3–12 students in the writing process. New grade 6–8 GT Science courses were offered to extend our grade 3–5 offerings. Revised Physical Science, U.S. History courses (basic, standard, and honors), Basic World History, and Basic Earth Science were also offered. Additional state histories were offered including Louisiana, Utah, and Oklahoma. New K–8 electives included Digital Arts, Entrepreneurship for 6–8, Gifted and Talented Literature Study 2, and Elementary and Middle School Chinese I. A series of high school electives were added including Entrepreneurship, Marketing, 3D Art I and Digital Arts I, Engineering Design I, Web Design I and II, Game Design, Earth Space Science, Marine Science, Critical Thinking and Study Skills, Life Management Skills, Sign Language II, and Chinese III. The integration of proprietary online tools and resources included *Lab Investigator: Chemical Reactions*, *WorkPad*, *Activity Tracker*, *Virtual Geoboard*, the *Virtual 2-D/3-D Shapes* tool, the *Virtual Spring Scale*, *Flash Cards*, and e-book software. The expansion of our online practice tool provided real-time visibility to students and teachers as to how students were mastering and completing their practice assignments. New supplemental online resources included MediaChalk™, Math-Whizz®, and DimensionU™, and new student clubs included Brainteaser and Digital Storytelling.

2012–2013: The 2012–2013 curriculum updates and enhancements demonstrated our continued focus on student learning, technology-based curricular and instructional resources, and the customization of our offerings. Our attention to math continued with revised grade 6–8 Math aligned to state and Common Core State Standards. Pearson’s *Grammar Jammers* were introduced in K–5, along with grade 3 Language Arts audio record activities to support reading fluency. Revised grade 6–8 Language Arts courses incorporated extensions on grammar, vocabulary, reading skills, and student collaborative discussions, as well as updated portfolios that reflect the writing process and *Writing with Power* resources, which included the incorporation of the new interactive *Guardians of Grammar*. Our K–5 program was enriched with the addition of elementary state histories that incorporate the IEXCEL instructional sequence and the Guild of Inquisitive Robots, Google Earth, and interactive timelines. New courses included Florida, Pennsylvania, Georgia, and California. Middle school social studies enhancements included Eastern and Western Hemisphere Social Studies courses, economics and civics units, the inclusion of Google Earth and a timeline tool, and numerous state-specific social studies courses. New K–8 Chinese II and Spanish I and II elective courses were introduced which actively engage students in viewing, listening, reading, and speaking activities. Our first Juilliard

eLearning Music courses were offered in January incorporating rich multimedia presentations, online tools, audio recordings, and interactive instructional activities to provide K–12 students the opportunity to learn music and share in musical experiences. Middle school and high Physical Education courses incorporated a new secondary Yoga series and our Home Life course series added *Interactive Art* and *Pet Care*. Additional new high school course and resource offerings included Algebra 2 (basic, standard, and honors) courses, Advanced Algebra with Financial Applications, Biology (basic, standard, and honors), AP Human Government, and state-specific social studies, as well as Forensics (Criminal Investigation), and Anatomy and Physiology electives. New math *Teachlet® Tutorials* and *GrammarJammers*, along with proprietary tools such as *Lab Investigator: Dissection*, *Digital Scale*, an expanded *Activity Tracker*, and *Guardians of Grammar* enhanced students' instructional experiences, as did increased deep linking directly to specific iText pages and enhanced e-book software. SuccessMaker® Reading, SuccessMaker® Math, MathXL®, Study Island's AP Test Prep, ReadingEggs, Reading Eggspress, Education City, and ESL Reading Smart were new resources for students and teachers. In addition, the Performing Arts, Sports, and Science and Technology Specialty Academies were introduced for students who excel in theatre, music, dance, or sports, or who have a significant interest in science, technology, engineering, or mathematics. Nexus Academy schools were also introduced this year, with five schools opening across Michigan and Ohio. These college preparatory high schools were designed to provide personalized learning through a unique blend of online and face-to-face classroom experiences.

This historical overview does not include the many daily, weekly, and yearly updates to our courses based on suggestions from parents, students, and teachers, as well as our continuing modification of lessons based on students' test score performance and changing state standards. Our current course offerings bear little resemblance to the curriculum we introduced in 2002–2003, but they continue to demonstrate our commitment to our students and schools, and to passing on our increasing buying power and continual investment in our program to you.

We hope you will take the opportunity to carefully read the exciting new *2013–2014 Program Guide* and explore all that these newest course offerings and enhancements offer our students. Let us know if you have any questions. As always, we look forward to discussing this further with you.

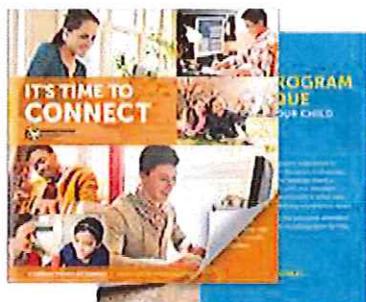
TO: Connections Academy and Nexus Academy™ School Boards
State/District Partners

FROM: Patricia Hoge, Executive Vice President of Curriculum and
Instruction and Chief Academic Officer

SUBJECT: Introduction of the 2014–2015 Curriculum and Instructional Program

DATE: March 31, 2014

CC: Barbara Dreyer, President
Peter Robertson, SVP School Operations
VP, Executive Director, and Directors of Schools
Connections Academy and Nexus Academy School Leaders



In what has become an annual tradition, this memo serves as the formal introduction of the curriculum and instructional plans for the upcoming school year. As we reviewed this past fall, our analysis of student performance and the adoption and implementation of updated state standards and next generation assessments have caused us to closely examine the rigor and relevance of our curriculum, instructional practices, and professional development to ensure that all efforts, improvements, and new offerings support students on their path to college and career readiness. In order to do this, we must ensure that students are learning at the appropriate rate and depth, and are able to transfer and demonstrate their learning in ways that are consistent with the expectations of 21st century learners. We have much to celebrate this year regarding student performance in areas such as reading language arts, science, and social studies, as well as SAT and ACT scores that are at or above national averages, a significant increase in the numbers of students taking AP courses and examinations, and students' college and university acceptances. However, we continue to be challenged with how best to increase overall student learning and performance, particularly in the areas of mathematics and writing. In this memo, I hope you will see how our unwavering commitment to student learning in all areas is driving data analysis, curricular and instructional decisions, resource allocations, teacher support, and professional development.

FOCUS ON STUDENT PERFORMANCE

Throughout the 2013–2014 school year, members of school, curriculum and instruction, and software development leadership teams have come together to discuss and develop a comprehensive research and data driven approach to curriculum, multimedia, and technology development that is focused on improved student learning. These teams have focused their discussions and efforts on identifying and applying learning research and learning sciences to development and resource decisions while working to ensure we are

using technology to view data and results, deriving meaning from the data, and changing our curriculum and instructional practices based on student learning outcomes. As part of this effort, the teams have adopted Grant Wiggins' belief statement that "effective transfer of learning is the essence of mastery" and his definition of mastery:

Mastery is effective transfer of learning in authentic and worthy performance. Students have mastered a subject when they are fluent, even creative, in using their knowledge, skills, and understanding in key performance challenges and contexts at the heart of that subject, as measured against valid and high standards.

Grant Wiggins, *Educational Leadership*, December 2013/January 2014 | Volume 71 | Number 4
"Getting Students to Mastery" pp. 10–16

This focus on student learning and mastery has resulted in the team's dedicated focus on the following:

- **Practice** that is meaningful, deliberate, and ongoing, and that provides students multiple opportunities to learn and demonstrate learning without negative consequences to build fluency and long term memory.
- **Feedback** that is valid and provided early and often to guide and support student learning.
- **Student engagement and motivation** that is focused on the value of learning, self-efficacy, emotion, grit, and persistence.
- **Intervention** that is timely, targeted, monitored, and effective.
- **Data visualization** systems that present real time student performance data to key stakeholders.

In addition, our data analysis and intensive review of student performance has indicated several factors we believe significantly affect student performance in online schools, including the following:

- the timing of students' enrollment in a full time online school
- the relationship between a students' household income level and state test performance
- family engagement with the decision to enroll in an online school¹

While these factors also impact student performance in traditional schools, we believe they need to be addressed in online and blended schools with different educational strategies, programs, and resources. To further support our focus on continuous improvement and these student performance factors, a number of new programs, features, and functionality were added to the Connections and Nexus Academy programs for the 2013–2014 school year, including the following:

¹ *AdvancED Source*, Spring 2013, "Challenges in Measuring Online School Performance" p. 4

- A formal Onboarding Program was created, including *Getting Started* courses for all late enrolling students (defined as starting one or more days beyond the semester start date).
- Formative assessment tools and instructional resources were increased, including the following:
 - Scantron® Performance Series™ pre-, mid-, and post-assessments for high school students
 - Pearson’s WriteToLearn™ written language support for grades 4–12
 - Texas Instruments™ (TI) Emulator software for high school math students
 - Teacher Homepage Intervention Indicators and Instructional Alerts to provide teachers with increased data visualization to support data driven instruction and intervention
- Randomized assessments, timed assessments, and access to the Turnitin® plagiarism checking tool to support academic integrity were implemented.
- A new year-long professional development series of 10 monthly sessions was introduced, which focuses on the instructional shifts as a result of updated state standards and next generation assessments and on data-driven instructional decisions and interventions. To date, these sessions have resulted in the following:
 - 277 LiveLesson® sessions
 - 16,555 teacher attendees across all synchronous sessions
 - 7,586 post-session activity uploads to Teacher e-Portfolios, including the following teacher reflections:

This session was an eye opener for me. I often think about the academic vocabulary associated with a standard but I've never thought about academic vocabulary in terms of student learning. I will definitely be more aware of this as I plan future lessons.

This session was extremely beneficial for classifying specific struggles that low-income students may have. Most educators would agree about each of the seven differences, however, classifying them allows us to actively create strategies that can improve student learning.

This was a beneficial PD for me because it made me realize the importance of student monitoring and the different ways I can check a student’s progress. Since attending this PD, I have made it a point to provide very detailed and supportive feedback for each and every student for all assignments submitted to me.

Our focus on student learning and professional development continues to reflect Pearson’s focus on efficacy and assurance that their programs have a positive effect on learning. Following Pearson’s efficacy framework and the focus on delivering measurable learning outcomes, we continue to implement a multilevel evaluation system that incorporates regular reviews of student performance results, user feedback, assessment performance analysis, and district, state, and national content standards and course requirements.

Feedback continues to be collected daily through our StarTrack system, the EMS feedback tool, the annual Parent Satisfaction survey, and from conversations and comments made by teachers and board members. Our commitment to accountability and continuous improvement continues to be displayed in the latest 2013–2014 StarTrack lesson ratings from students, teachers, and Learning Coaches as well as in our 2012–2013 AP, SAT, ACT, and State Testing performance.

StarTrack Lesson/Course Ratings – January 2014 (2013–2014 School Year to date)

- Total ratings – 523, 993
- Total ratings with comments – 23,396
- Average rating – 4.14 (5-point scale)

AP Exam Scores (2012–2013 scores reported on a 5-point scale)

- National AP Performance Scores
 - 59.3% scored 3–5 (3 = Qualified, 4 = Well Qualified, 5 = Extremely Well Qualified).
- Connections Academy students
 - 50.2% scored 3–5 (3 = Qualified, 4 = Well Qualified, 5 = Extremely Well Qualified); 13.1% scored 5 and 16.9% scored 4.
 - Connections Academy had a 99.4% increase in the number of students who took AP courses from 2011–2012 to 2012–2013.
 - Connections Academy had a 116% increase in the number of students who took AP exams from 2011–2012 to 2012–2013.
 - While our overall participation numbers still remain lower than we would like, schools are setting goals and implementing plans to promote AP course placements.

ACT 2012–2013

- National average composite score – 21.1
- Connections Academy students' average composite score – 22

SAT 2012–2013

- CA average critical reading 524 (national average 496)
- CA average math score 484 (national average 514)
- CA average writing score 489 (national average 488)
- CA average combined score 1495 (national average 1498)

State Testing

- In 2012–2013, Connections Academy scored equivalent to or higher than corresponding statewide reading/language arts performance in 114/149 tested grades (76.5% of all grade levels tested across all Connections Academy schools)

in all states). This compares to last year's performance of 77/120 tested grades (72.5%).

- The corresponding percentages for math are 22.1% (which remains our highest priority for improvement), 69% for science, and 45.2% for writing. This compares to the previous year's 11% for math, 50% for science, and 48% for writing.
- Compared to similar students working in a like environment (i.e., our closest national competitor), Connections Academy scored equivalent to or higher than 94.0% of tested grades in reading/language arts, 93.0% in math, 96.0% in science, and 100% in writing. This compares to Connections Academy's 2011–2012 performance of 91.0% in reading/language arts, 92.0% in math, 96.0% in science, and 91.0% in writing.

While we consistently outperform other full-time virtual schools and are pleased with the progress we have made, there is still much work for us to do. We continue to have high levels of students who are not proficient on their state exams, particularly in math and writing, and we want more of our students taking AP courses and going on to college. All of this continues to demand and receive our attention.

CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

While we continue to attend to state accountability outcomes and their role in determining and monitoring student academic performance, we balance this with the importance of having a challenging and engaging curriculum that excites our students and creates or reinforces a lifelong love of learning.

Connections Education continues to employ a team of experienced and talented curriculum development and production specialists, assessment specialists, curriculum project managers, content and copy editors, multimedia and instructional designers and developers, and quality assurance specialists. These individuals apply their deep expertise in online instruction and academic and technical disciplines to the development of curriculum that supports 21st century readiness for every student. In addition, Connections Education's teachers and Teacher Course Liaisons play an essential role in the development, implementation, and maintenance of our high quality curriculum and instruction (see section below on the role of teachers in the curriculum development process). This collaboration between teachers and development teams ensures that feedback from the daily implementation of the curriculum and from student performance informs the curriculum development, maintenance, and revision processes.

STANDARDS FOR COURSE DEVELOPMENT

This year as part of our ongoing commitment to continuous improvement and to meeting the needs and requirements of our schools, programs, Boards, and authorizers, we have developed and adopted a set of standards for all current and future course development. These standards are driving course design and development as well as the selection and development of instructional tools and resources.

1. **Course alignment to all state standards** – All courses are to be backward designed and aligned to state standards, including Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) as appropriate.
2. **Accessibility** – All course content is to be developed to meet or exceed the intent of WCAG (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines) 2.0 AA Success Criterion, and all Connexus®-delivered content is to meet or exceed the intent of WCAG 2.0 AA Success Criterion.
3. **Platform agnostic** – Content is to be consumable on devices and software used most often by students and teachers (e.g., Mozilla FireFox®, Apple® Safari®, Google Chrome®, Microsoft® IE®).
4. **Rights and permissions for global use** – Any material used in a course or from which the course is derived (e.g., publisher textbooks) must be able to be used worldwide.
5. **Rights and permissions to be delivered on multiple platforms** – Course delivery must not be limited to only the Connexus platform.
6. **Ability to deliver secondary courses fully online** – To support various school and program needs (e.g., iNaCA, summer school), any new course in grades 9–12 must have the ability to be delivered without physical materials.
7. **Tagged standards** – All assessment items, lessons, resources, objectives, and assets are tagged to state and national standards including CCSS and NGSS (as appropriate).

TEACHER INVOLVEMENT IN CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

While Connections Education uses specially trained curriculum developers to build its courses, teachers also play an important role in the development process. We found that the best way to leverage teacher involvement in curriculum has evolved over the years. While we have engaged teachers in the actual writing and reviewing of lessons, we found that it is difficult to have teachers as the primary authors of online lessons due to the timing of course development, the late spring/early summer deadlines for course completion, and the full-time commitment that is required. While teachers have always been involved in various components of the course build process, the Curriculum Development team recognizes the importance in involving teachers throughout the development process. As a result, this effort has been expanded and formalized this year so that now teachers can contribute in the following ways:

- Collaborate with the Curriculum team to review planning documents.
- Review and provide feedback on unit and lesson content.
- Evaluate lesson/assessment alignment.
- Provide suggestions for Curriculum Based Assessments and LiveLesson session content.

CURRICULUM ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Beginning in 2010–2011, Connections Education implemented a Curriculum Advisory Committee (CAC) that was intended to have representation from all of its governing boards and other governing authorities along with its school leaders. Over the years, the CAC has provided input on areas of strength and need regarding curriculum offerings and student performance, while many other governing board members have provided input directly to school leaders, the curriculum department, and to the Connections Education executive team. The strong focus on the new career and technical education (CTE) courses is a direct result of this input and requests. This year’s committee continues this work and is scheduled to meet again on April 17.

2014–2015 CURRICULUM OFFERINGS

The 2014–2015 curriculum offerings demonstrate our continued commitment to integrate supportive technologies, inquiry- and problem-based instructional approaches, and higher order thinking skills that support the “Framework for 21st Century Learning”.² We continue to learn and benefit from being a part of the Pearson family. As the world’s leading learning company, Pearson continues to provide the Connections Education’s curriculum and instructional services teams with significant opportunities to learn and benefit from their expertise in curriculum development, assessment and instruction, research, and teacher professional development. The Connections Education curriculum and multimedia design teams continue to partner to create innovative proprietary instructional tools and resources designed to provide an engaging and personalized learning experience for students. A summary of the new curricular offerings is presented below, and the entire breadth and depth of the curriculum is provided in the *2014–2015 Program Guide*. The Guide and the summary below showcase the tremendous range and scope of content, interactive instructional activities, and assessments available to your students and families.

WHAT’S NEW ACROSS ALL GRADES?

- Longitudinal Evaluation of Academic Progress® (LEAP) Assessments – In response to teacher and Learning Coach requests, the LEAP, Scantron, and Measures of Academic Progress® (MAP) formative tests will now be presented as short courses that will appear on students’ planners. Students will be automatically assigned to courses based on a testing window timeline, their grade

² Partnership for 21st Century Skills’ Framework for 21st Century Learning: WASHINGTON, DC 20001: 2011

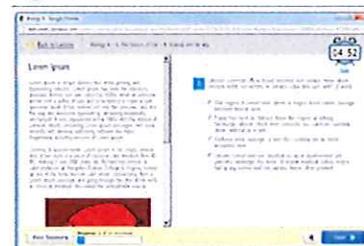
level, and type of test appropriate to their school. Directions and tips for families will be provided in the backpack of each course.

- Science Assessment Tagging – To continue the effort of tagging assessment items to learning objectives that was initiated in language arts and math, the tagging of science assessment items will begin during the 2014–2015 school year. This initiative will provide teachers the ability to see student performance by objective and enable them to use this data to provide timely and targeted instruction and support.
- Assessments – For new 2014–2015 courses (middle school language arts and art), and for future courses, students will be introduced to a new assessment viewer that will present assessment items in a more robust and student-friendly manner. In support of the best practices of instructional design and the next generation assessment format and style, the new viewer will include the following:

- Honor code and introductory elements – Before students begin an assessment, they will be reminded of the honor code and be informed of introductory information such as whether the assessment is timed, how long they have on the assessment, the number of questions, and the types of questions they will encounter. Please note that elementary assessments are not timed.



- Questions with passages – When students have passages to read as they do in language arts, the passage will be on the left side of the screen with corresponding questions on the right. This will alleviate long scrolling through the passages to get to the questions.



- Sequential or multipart questions – The new viewer will have the ability to allow students to see two questions at a time that relate to one another. These multipart or sequential questions are dependent on one another, so it is important that students be able to view and answer them together. When there are related questions that connect to a passage, students will be able to see the questions and passages, which will alleviate large amounts of scrolling.

- Assessment summary – At any time, students will be able to see a summary of their progress and click on the question(s) that remain unanswered. They may also go back to review their answers and make changes before they submit.



- Accessibility – As part of our course design and implementation protocols, we have committed to providing access to ALL students. To that end, as noted above, we are following the WCAG (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines) 2.0 Success Criterion guidelines and are holding ourselves to the AA rating. In support of this decision, all members of the curriculum team will be trained on the standards, and there will be an additional team that is dedicated to these efforts. All of the following are examples of this work:
 - All PDF documents are tagged appropriately for a screen reader to read.
 - Online textbooks and any e-book resources are able to be read by a screen reader.
 - All images have alternative descriptive text.
 - Lessons, interactive presentations, etc., have keyboard functionality.
 - Videos are closed-captioned and have a robust transcript that describes the visually presented material.
 - Color contrast is evaluated.
 - Alternative assignments are provided when needed.
- Course/Unit Reranking – In 2012–2013, we introduced new functionality within our curriculum management system (Connexus) that enables the reordering of curriculum units within and between courses to ensure the sequence of instruction aligns to state-specific expectations and testing cycles. This functionality resulted in the reordering of units in more than 200 courses over the past two years based on schools’ prioritized requests. Schools have again identified their needs for the reordering of curriculum units, and this will result in hundreds of additional customized courses for the upcoming school year.
- Clubs – In addition to the expansive list of clubs and activities, 2014–2015 offerings will include the following:

- **Broadcast Club** – Members will learn about choreography, set design, tech crew, and musical scores for Broadway productions. Working both individually and collaboratively, students will be encouraged to write plays and musical scores, and they will learn about the history and trends in broadcast media while exploring print, audio, and video mediums. LiveLesson sessions will provide opportunities for students to share their theatrical talents as well as presentations similar to segments on television news magazines.
- **Leadership and Global Awareness** – This club will challenge students who are natural leaders in their communities to take on a leadership role at the state, national, and international levels. Students will meet regularly to discuss, plan, and share service learning projects and outcomes. Additionally, students will learn about historic and current global cultures in order to better prepare them for careers and lives in our global economy.

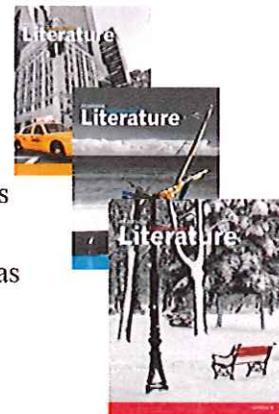
WHAT'S NEW IN THE ELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE GRADES (K–8)?

- **Kindergarten Coaching Guide** – To further support Learning Coaches (LCs) as they work with their kindergarten students, kindergarten LCs now have the option to view the Learning Coach guide in a separate window. The Learning Coach guide is now accessible when the student is logged into Connexus, which enables the LC to read the particular portion of the guide that accompanies the lesson as their student simultaneously completes it. The ability to open the Learning Coach guide in a new window maximizes the user experience and allows the LC to easily facilitate the lesson as his or student completes it.



- **CD Replacement in Social Studies** – Currently, in grades 1–5 social studies courses, students receive a CD that corresponds with their Scott Foresman text. In response to many requests from teachers and families, the CD activities will be replaced with alternative multimedia activities and questions for students to complete and/or discuss with their Learning Coaches.

- **New Middle School Language Arts Courses and GT** – As part of our six-year course rebuild cycle and commitment to continuous improvement, these courses are being rebuilt for the 2014–2015 school year. Students will interact with Pearson’s *Literature* online textbooks and accompanying Pearson digital assets such as the Big Question and Background videos as well as



proprietary tools and resources, including *Guardians of Grammar* and new skills-based Teachlet® tutorials. A pretest presented at the beginning of each unit will provide feedback to the student, teacher, and Learning Coach on a student's preexisting knowledge of the unit's content. Students will engage in researching, speaking, and listening options throughout the new courses as they are presented with student choice opportunities. The integration of Pearson's WriteToLearn writing resource will give students feedback on their writing that they can apply to graded portfolio assessments. This tool will supplement, not replace, the valuable feedback students receive from teachers regarding their writing.



- Sixth grade – Through the study of authors such as Elizabeth Partridge, Gary Soto, and Langston Hughes, students will ponder such questions as “Is conflict always bad?”, “How do we decide who we are?”, and “How much do our communities shape us?” Short-term research will engage students' curiosity and critical-thinking skills. Students will be encouraged to support their ideas with evidence as they practice narrative, informative, and persuasive writing.
- Seventh grade – By studying authors such as Amy Tan, Emily Dickinson, and Laurence Yep, students will ponder such questions as “Does every conflict have a winner?”, “What is the best way to communicate?”, and “Do others see us more clearly than we see ourselves?” Short- and long-term research will engage their curiosity and critical-thinking skills. Students will be encouraged to integrate knowledge and ideas into their work as they practice narrative, informative, and persuasive writing.
- Eighth grade – Through the study of authors such as Nikki Giovanni, Elie Wiesel, and Mark Twain, students will ponder such questions as “Can all conflicts be resolved?”, “Is it our differences or our similarities that matter most?”, and “Are yesterday's heroes important today?” Students will exercise their curiosity and critical-thinking skills through short- and long-term research. They will refine and reinforce their skills by practicing narrative, informative, and persuasive writing.
- **New Middle School Art** – The middle school art program is organized around the three artistic processes of creating, presenting, and responding. In addition, the program emphasizes how art and design can drive innovation in the same way science, technology, engineering, and mathematics do. Throughout the courses, students will use various media and techniques to construct projects, collaborate with peers, and critique their own work as well as the work of other artists.

Students will explore how local, national, and international art influences ideas, actions, cultures, and environments.

- **New Middle School Health and Physical Education** – New proprietary Connections Education courses will replace the current health and physical education courses. Students will balance health, safety, and fitness instruction with their physical activity as they participate in Connections Academy fitness, Vinyasa yoga, and/or personal fitness activities.

WHAT'S NEW IN THE HIGH SCHOOL GRADES (9–12)?

- **CTE Courses** – As part of our ongoing commitment to helping all students prepare for post-high school success, 21 new career and technical education (CTE) courses were added to course offering during the 2013–2014 school year. To continue to support and expand this effort, 12 additional CTE courses will be offered in 2014–2015. Please refer to the *2014–2015 Program Guide* for full course descriptions.
 - Accounting II
 - Business Math
 - Developmental Writing
 - Human Resources Management
 - Introduction to Communication
 - Introduction to Paralegal Profession
 - Java Programming I
 - Java Programming II
 - Leadership and Supervision in Business
 - Medical Law and Ethics
 - Principles of Management
 - Public Speaking
- **World Languages** – As an expansion of Connections Education's proprietary elementary and middle school Spanish and Chinese language courses, new Spanish and Chinese courses will be offered for high schools students during the 2014–2015 school year.

- Spanish I: Students will cover basic vocabulary, grammar, spelling, and punctuation to build a solid foundation for further study. Assignments will include engaging in simple conversation with native speakers, writing paragraphs, and listening to Spanish dialogue. Students will also study the history and culture of Spanish-speaking peoples.
 - Spanish II: As they engage in more advanced conversations, write paragraphs and stories, and translate to and from Spanish, students will improve their vocabulary and grammar. Intense listening comprehension exercises will aid in understanding more complex thoughts and subjects.
 - Chinese I: This course will emphasize listening skills, including the mastery of Chinese tones and tonal changes as well as grammar and vocabulary skills. Students also begin to identify and write Chinese characters.
 - Chinese II: This course will enable students to further develop the skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing Mandarin Chinese at a more advanced level. As they are immersed in Chinese culture, students will expand their vocabulary, practice interacting with others, and learn the use of appropriate terms to communicate in everyday situations.
- **Course Enhancements**
 - AP United States History – Updates are being made to this course to support the revised College Board standards and examination. Updates include a focus on three key concepts for each of the nine historical periods as well as a focus on seven thematic learning objectives (i.e., Identity; Peopling; Work, Exchange, and Technology; Politics and Power; Environment and Geography; America in the World; and Ideas, Beliefs, and Culture).
 - AP Computer Science – Course updates are focusing on the new College Board lab requirements, which consist of 20 hours of hands-on lab experiences. The labs will include the following:
 - Allow students to explore computing in context at a significant level by building upon existing code that provides examples of good style and appropriate use of programming language constructs.
 - Contain a significant problem-solving component in which students study alternative approaches for solving a problem.

- Provide students with experience working with programs involving multiple interactive classes and may involve decomposing a program into classes and using inheritance, interfaces, and other object-oriented concepts.
- AP Calculus AB/BC – The AP Practice workbook will be replaced with Study Island practice problems for increased feedback to students.
- AP English Literature and Composition – Students will complete activities in *Barron's AP English Literature and Composition, 5th Edition*.
- Texas AP English Literature and Composition – Students will see updated practice test names, and Study Island test preparation will replace activities students formerly completed in *Barron's AP English Literature and Composition, 4th Edition*.
- Calculus – *Thomas' Calculus* © 2014AP will replace the current text.
- American Government, World History, and Economics – The physical workbooks will be replaced with digital, fillable worksheets.
- Physical Science, Chemistry, and Earth Science – The Virtual Lab CD activities will be replaced with online and hands-on lab activities.
- Emergent Computer Technology – There will be updates and revisions to technology content and instructional activities.
- Introduction to Computers and Applications – There will be updates and revisions to technology content and instructional activities.
- There will be state specific course development and course enhancements (e.g., Integrated math courses for GACA and UCA, state history and health course enhancements for NMCA, MCA, TECCA).

Historical Perspective: 2002–2003 through 2013–2014

Connections Education continues to expand and improve our product offerings based on student learning and direct feedback from all of our stakeholders. Below is a summary of some of the changes and improvements that have occurred since our first school year.

2002–2003: In our first school year, grades K–8 were offered and primarily used Calvert School curriculum with some modifications to support state alignments. Assessment occurred every 20 days and covered all courses in one test. Clubs and Activities were introduced for elementary and middle school students.

2003–2004: Connections Academy completely relaunched all Calvert lessons into the new Learning Management System (LMS), reengineered with Microsoft's® .NET framework. This was accompanied by an approximately 30 percent expansion of Connections Academy-generated content to improve state alignments and enrich content with web-based lesson enhancements. New course-specific online assessments were introduced, allowing faster teacher feedback and integration into a web-based grade book. Calvert's handwriting approach was replaced with the nationally recognized Zaner-Bloser handwriting program. A hands-on science kit was included. Other additions included the Take Me to Your Readers program for grades K–2, new Zaner-Bloser spelling for grades 2–7, a physical education course, the introduction of a test preparation course, the incorporation of BrainPOP® multimedia content to enhance lessons, the addition of the World Book resource, and the introduction of the Journey North group interactive project. The program continued to serve grade K–8.

2004–2005: A new K–8 music program was introduced, and Teachlet tutorials (online interactive presentations) and *unitedstreaming* multimedia content were integrated into lessons. Preprinted lesson manuals for all K–8 core subjects were provided. Other additions included Skills Builder for enrichment and remediation and the introduction of the Home Life course. The program continued to serve grades K–8.

2005–2006: Ninth grade core courses were added, including a first-level high school Spanish course. Our program was further augmented by graded online discussions for high school courses, a revision and expansion of the test preparation program, and Hooked on Phonics™ program was added. This school year also saw the introduction of LiveLesson sessions, the teacher-led synchronous online instruction for remedial students, and the addition of French, Latin, and German language instruction for grades 1–4. The program received CITA (Commission on International and Trans-Regional Accreditation) accreditation this school year.



2006–2007: Tenth grade core courses were added in addition to several new high school electives. Completely new seventh and eighth grade social studies, language arts, and science courses were added based on 2006–2007 textbook editions, and they included iText (online textbooks) links within the lessons. Middle school Spanish, French, and German language courses were added, and the PACE (Program for All Children to Excel) was introduced for students struggling with basic literacy and numeracy. The trial adoption of the Study Island test preparation program began, and LiveLesson sessions were expanded for middle school and high school students. Hooked on Math™ was added, and the technology literacy program was expanded to provide a separate course for each grade level. New social studies courses in first and second grades and two new Home Life modules were offered. New art cards for the History of Painting elective were introduced, and the provision of science kits was expanded to all K–8 science courses. Foreign language offerings expanded to add two more levels of elementary French and German, and more clubs were added for a total of six for elementary, middle school, and

high school. A new WebQuest group interaction project was rolled out, and an online, interactive scientific calculator and virtual scientific lab experiments were introduced.

2007–2008: Eleventh grade courses were included, and high school electives were further expanded to include opportunities for independent study and career preparation. The use of LiveLesson sessions continued to grow. A math and reading gifted program for grades 3–8 was introduced, as well as basic and honors courses were added in high school. Eight Advanced Placement (AP®) courses were added to the high school offering. The Study Island test preparation program was fully adopted with state-specific content. New language instruction included Mandarin Chinese in middle school, as well as high school courses included French, German, Latin, and an expanded Spanish program. All foreign language courses were upgraded to include audio. A total of nine clubs and activities were offered for high school, and at least 11 were offered for elementary and middle school. Two Home Life modules were added to the course, middle school art and physical education courses were rolled out, and a WebQuest group interaction project (Frog and Toad Watch) was introduced. Also, BrainPOP Jr.® and BrainPOP content in Spanish became available to students.

2008–2009: The big news for 2008–2009 was the introduction of 12th grade and the resulting completion of a comprehensive K–12 curriculum. Core courses for grades 3–6 were completely redone with new textbooks, course guides, workbooks, and Teachlet tutorials. Kindergarten went through a substantial expansion and enhancement. A hands-on elementary school art program (grades 3–6) and a yoga program that is unique to Connections Academy were introduced. Grolier Online™'s full suite of online databases was made available to all students. For the high school program, in addition to the regular 12th grade courses, 18 AP courses were taught by Connections Academy's best teachers selected from our 14 schools. Exciting new electives included Speech and Debate, Music Appreciation, Sign Language, Digital Photography, Computer Programming (I and II), and Driver's Education. Of course, with 12th grade came SAT and ACT preparation courses, commencement ceremonies, class rings, and other graduation-related activities. As we do every year, there were literally hundreds of small and not-so-small enhancements made to the LMS. Of special note for this year is the completely new grade book functionality that allows teachers to view their entire class and even do basic analysis on performance patterns.

2009–2010: The major initiative for this year was the implementation of a completely new and improved first and second grade curriculum. These courses were developed from the ground up using the latest textbooks and other instructional resources from Scott-Foresman, McGraw-Hill, and Zaner-Bloser. These courses used the same age-appropriate course features developed for the upper elementary grades, along with the unique Learning Coach view that provides specific instructions and assistance both online and in a printed Course Guide. All kindergarten courses were further enhanced to include additional lesson content, improved standards alignment, and more online, interactive activities. New fourth and fifth grade art and physical education courses, as well as new 3–5 gifted and talented science courses and sign language courses were developed and implemented. High school enhancements included the addition of

Japanese I and II as well as the expansion of Spanish and French to include level IV. Basic, standard, and honors English 10 courses were completely rebuilt, along with basic versions for algebra 1, biology, American government, and physical science; major revisions were made to algebra 1 and geometry. Understanding that some students need supplemental, targeted supports beyond the core curriculum, Headsprout®, Hooked on Phonics, and Raz-Kids™ for struggling readers; SkillsTutor™ for basic skill practice; Study Island to ensure mastery of each individual state's standards; and Hotmath.com, which provides step-by-step answers to math homework programs, were offered to students. Several enhancements to our LMS and curriculum were designed and implemented to uphold and enforce the principles of academic integrity. These academic integrity efforts included the availability of anti-plagiarism software for students and teachers to automatically scan work for evidence of plagiarism, and the requirement for students to complete assessments in order by limiting the ability to view upcoming assessments until previous assessments have been submitted. Connections Education's curriculum was awarded with the following honors: a BESSIE Award (Best Educational Software) for our Language Arts Planning website, K to the 8th Power, and an EDDIE award (Education Software Review) for Best High School Science. BESSIE awards serve to recognize innovative content-rich programs and websites that foster educational growth. EDDIE awards recognize innovative and content-rich software and websites that augment the classroom curriculum, improve teacher productivity, and/or provide enrichment in a homeschooling environment. *ComputED Gazette* sponsors the annual education software review and bestows the BESSIE and EDDIE awards selecting from a worldwide field of educational publishers.

2010–2011: This school year brought significant enhancements to our curriculum and instruction offering. In addition to newly developed proprietary core courses, modifications were made to the majority of our K–12 offerings. These modifications targeted increased interactivity and opportunities for student engagement, assessment of student learning, and closer alignment to state and national standards. New multimedia instructional tools and resources were provided to students and teachers including our proprietary virtual rock and mineral kit (*Lab Investigator: Rocks and Minerals*), math *WorkPad*, vocabulary *Flash Cards*, as well as the introduction of online practice activities and e-books. The addition of elective and club offerings and high school alternative novel units increased the personalization offerings we are able to provide students. Connections Education also won a Best Practices in Distance Learning Award for Earth Science. The United States Distance Learning Association (USDLA) bestows awards to “outstanding programming, which [has] designed and delivered outstanding and comprehensive best practices distance learning programming for an individual program or a series of programs. This award category includes online distance learning, video conferencing, and satellite distance.” Connections Education also won a BESSIE award for Algebra 1; an EDDIE award for Best High School Science for Earth Science; and was a finalist for a Distinguished Achievement Awards (DAA) from the Association of Educational Publishers (AEP) for Art 6. AEP, one of the largest and longest-running awards programs for educational products, aims to identify products that exemplify the highest standards of professional, quality educational content.

2011–2012: The curriculum offerings the year demonstrated our continued commitment to student learning and to technology-based curricular enhancements as we continued to increase the depth and breadth of content, interactive instructional activities, and assessments available to students. With a major focus on math performance, revised and enhanced 3–8 math courses were offered in addition to the new essential math courses. Revised Gifted and Talented Math 7 (Algebra 1) and Gifted and Talented Math 8 (Geometry) were provided, as well as Pre-Algebra, Algebra 1 (basic, standard, and honors), and Geometry (basic, standard, and honors). In language arts, alternative novel units were provided in grades 6–8 as well as new English 10, 11, and 12 (basic, standard, and honors). The 6 Trait Power Write® program was implemented to support grade 3–12 students in the writing process. New grade 6–8 gifted and talented science courses were offered to extend our grade 3–5 offerings. Revised Physical Science, U.S. History (basic, standard, and honors), Basic World History, and Basic Earth Science were also offered. Additional state histories were offered including Louisiana, Utah, and Oklahoma. New K–8 electives included Digital Arts, Entrepreneurship for 6–8, Gifted and Talented Literature Study 2, and Elementary and Middle School Chinese I. A series of high school electives were added including Entrepreneurship, Marketing, 3-D Art I and Digital Arts I, Engineering Design I, Web Design I and II, Game Design, Earth Space Science, Marine Science, Critical Thinking and Study Skills, Life Management Skills, Sign Language II, and Chinese III. The integration of proprietary online tools and resources included *Lab Investigator: Chemical Reactions*, *WorkPad*, *Activity Tracker*, *Virtual Geoboard*, *Virtual 2-D/3-D Shapes*, *Virtual Spring Scale*, *Flash Cards*, and e-book software. The expansion of our online practice tool provided real-time visibility to students and teachers as to how students were mastering and completing their practice assignments. New supplemental online resources included MediaChalk™, Math-Whizz®, and DimensionU™; new student clubs included Brainteaser and Digital Storytelling. This year also saw Connections Education win a TechLearning award from *ComputED* for our interactive science tools, Elementary Chinese, and our Oklahoma state signature course. We won the Awards of Excellence from Tech & Learning for our Utah state history course, Elementary Chinese, and for our science simulation tools. We were finalists in the Science Simulation Tools and School Management System categories from EdTechDigest.com, and we were a finalist for an AEP Distinguished Achievement Award (DAA) for our science simulation tools and our language arts K–5 courses.

2012–2013: The 2012–2013 curriculum updates and enhancements demonstrated our continued focus on student learning, technology-based curricular and instructional resources, and the customization of our offerings. Our attention to math continued with revised grade 6–8 math courses aligned to state and Common Core State Standards. Pearson’s *Grammar Jammers* were introduced in K–5, along with grade 3 language arts audio record activities to support reading fluency. Revised grade 6–8 language arts courses incorporated extensions on grammar, vocabulary, reading skills, and student collaborative discussions, as well as updated portfolios that reflect the writing process and *Writing with Power* resources. They also included the incorporation of the new interactive *Guardians of Grammar*. Our K–5 program was enriched with the addition of elementary state histories that incorporate the IEXC³EL instructional sequence, the Guild

of Inquisitive Robots, Google® Earth, and interactive timelines. New courses included Florida, Pennsylvania, Georgia, and California. Middle school social studies enhancements included Eastern and Western Hemisphere Social Studies, economics and civics units, the inclusion of Google Earth and a timeline tool, and numerous state-specific social studies courses. New K–8 Chinese II and Spanish I and II elective courses were introduced that actively engage students in viewing, listening, reading, and speaking activities. Our first Juilliard eLearning Music courses were offered in January. They incorporated rich multimedia presentations, online tools, audio recordings, and interactive instructional activities to provide K–12 students the opportunity to learn music and share in musical experiences. Middle school and high school physical education courses incorporated a new secondary yoga series, and our Home Life course series added Interactive Art and Pet Care lessons. Additional new high school course and resource offerings included Algebra 2 (basic, standard, and honors) courses, Advanced Algebra with Financial Applications, Biology (basic, standard, and honors), AP Human Government, and state-specific social studies as well as Forensics (Criminal Investigation) and Anatomy and Physiology electives. New math Teachlet Tutorials and *Grammar Jammers*, along with proprietary tools such as *Lab Investigator: Dissection*, *Digital Scale*, an expanded *Activity Tracker*, and *Guardians of Grammar*, enhanced students' instructional experiences as did an increase in deep linking directly to specific iText pages and enhanced e-book software. SuccessMaker® Reading, SuccessMaker® Math, MathXL®, Study Island's AP Test Prep, ReadingEggs, Reading Eggspress, Education City, and ESL Reading Smart were new resources for students and teachers. In addition, the Performing Arts, Sports, and Science and Technology Specialty Academies were introduced for students who excel in theatre, music, dance, or sports, or who have a significant interest in science, technology, engineering, or mathematics. Nexus Academy schools were also introduced this year, with five schools opening across Michigan and Ohio. These college preparatory high schools were designed to provide personalized learning through a unique blend of online and face-to-face classroom experiences. This year also saw Connections Education win an EdTech Digest award for our Juilliard eLearning music courses, Nexus Academy, and Elementary Chinese. We won BESSIE awards from *ComputEd* for Experiencing Music, Living Music, a middle school math course, and for GradPoint, our remediation website. We won EDDIE awards from *ComputEd* for Science 8, our vocational training career and technical education (CTE) courses, Juilliard eLearning music courses, and GradPoint, the remediation website. We were a finalist for a Software Industry and Information Association (SIIA) award for our lab investigator tool.

2013–2014: To further support our focus on continuous improvement, a significant number of new programs, features, and functionality were added to the Connections Education program for the 2013–2014 school year. A completely new and robust kindergarten program actively engaged students in a Ready, Learn, Do instructional sequence throughout their language arts, math, science, social studies, art, and physical fitness courses. Animated avatars, such as Gator the alligator, introduced and reinforced essential skills and standards, while new interactive lesson activities provided frequent opportunities for student practice and engaged learning. To support Connections

Academy's California schools, a transitional kindergarten program extended the new kindergarten program over two years, enabling younger students to successfully transition from their preschool programs to full day kindergarten. In addition, grades 1–5 language arts courses were enhanced to increase alignment to standards and provide students increased opportunities to build academic vocabulary, engage with a balance of literary and informational text, build knowledge in the disciplines, provide text-based answers, and write from multiple sources. Grades 1–5 math courses were enhanced to focus on additional practice and learning activities to support students in increasing their math fluency, gaining a deeper understanding of mathematical concepts and practices, and applying their learning to new and relevant settings. New middle school science courses were inspired by state standards and the foundations of the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS), which focus on science and engineering practices, disciplinary core ideas, and crosscutting concepts. In the spirit of the NGSS and in accordance with 21st century skills, the new media-rich state specific science courses enabled students to engage actively in inquiry-based investigations in Earth, life, and physical science, and STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) projects, as well as cross-disciplinary and cross-curricular activities. New middle school science gifted and talented modules provided gifted and talented students increased opportunities for inquiry-based investigations and engagement in real-life problem-solving activities presented as project-based learning experiences. New K–8 educational technology and online learning courses engaged students in technology education aligned to the most current National Educational Technology Standards (NETS) standards. New social studies courses for 2013–2014 included state histories for Indiana, Michigan, New Mexico, Ohio, and Oregon, as well as an enhancement of Eastern and Western Hemisphere for South Carolina, Indiana, and Wisconsin students. To support students' preparation for post-high school success, 21 new career and technical education (CTE) courses were offered that were organized by career cluster and career pathway, including such diverse courses as Introduction to Homeland Security, Introduction to Medical Assisting, Introduction to Business, and Introduction to Sociology, as well as Learning Microsoft® Office® 2010 and Computer Literacy for IC3. Additional high school offerings included Algebra 1 and 2, Part 1 and Part 2 courses, high school English 10 and 11 revisions and enhancements, Arizona State History, and a Sports Management course. This year also brought an expansion of the Juilliard eLearning course offerings by adding four additional courses to the K–12 music offerings. Musical concepts and techniques were reinforced with demonstrations, recordings, and video performances by Juilliard faculty, students, and alumni. To support our commitment to academic integrity, enhancements to the Connexus assessment manager were introduced that included the ability to randomize assessment items for middle and high school and present timed tests in high school science and social studies.

Connections Education continued to offer more than 20 clubs and activities and provide students with increased live synchronous learning opportunities and speaker series sessions, increased presentation and competition opportunities, increased student-to-student engagement, and additional opportunities to engage in college and career exploration and planning. This year's *Connector* yearbook presented students with an online interactive yearbook featuring student photos and information, photos of school events and faculty/staff photos, and the ability to virtually sign one another's yearbook.

This year also saw Connections Education as a finalist for a Software Industry and Information Association (SIIA) award for our Connexus online management system. (Please note: Other awards and distinctions may be forthcoming as reporting deadlines are still open.)

This historical overview serves as a high level summary of curriculum development and enhancements, but it does not include the many daily, weekly, and yearly updates to our courses based on suggestions from parents, students, and teachers, as well as our continuing modification of lessons based on students' test score performance and changing state standards. Although our current course offerings bear little resemblance to the curriculum we introduced in 2002–2003, they continue to demonstrate our commitment to your students and schools, and to passing on our increasing buying power and continual investment in our program to you.

I am hopeful that it is evident through this memo that our curriculum offerings provide not only a broad and relevant offering to students across the K–12 grade range, but that they provide significant differentiation and customization to fit your student population, state requirements, priorities, and funding considerations. Please take the opportunity to carefully read the exciting new *2014–2015 Program Guide* and explore all that these newest course offerings and enhancements offer your students. Let us know if you have any questions. As always, we look forward to discussing this further with you.

33. Darwin proposed that evolution proceeded at a slow and steady pace, a model known as gradualism. But his Galápagos finches did not follow this model. What model of evolution did they follow? Explain how the two models differ.

34. The alga *Chlamydomonas* normally reproduces asexually. However, it switches to sexual reproduction when there is an unfavorable change in its environment. Would *Chlamydomonas* evolve more quickly in a favorable environment or an unfavorable environment? Explain your answer.

35. Explain the proposed relationship between an asteroid impact and the Cretaceous mass extinction.