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“Think back to your dreams for this school and let us know if we’ve got this right.” Stephanie Davolos Harden gave those directions to the founders and builders of the school gathered on May 20<sup>th</sup> for the official unveiling of the school’s first Strategic Plan.

The three dozen people present at the unveiling included Nancy and Ted Sizer and Lori and Brian McDermott who helped conceive of the school; Peter Garbus and Melanie Gallo, the founding school leaders; Bob Hildreth and Ron Ansin, two major philanthropic investors in the school; Bill Flynn, the consultant who facilitated the planning process; and past and present staff, students, families and board members.

She thanked the school’s early leaders for developing a powerful mission. “Thank you for leaving us this wonderful mission statement which clearly states who we are. Don’t mess with the mission was a very clear message when we began this process.”

“Visitors to the school are continually impressed that students, parents and staff know and believe so strongly in the school’s mission,” explained Ms. Davolos Harden. “We were able to get right to work on developing our 2018 Vision for the school. This vision describes how the school will fulfill its mission at the end of our third charter term in 2018.” Everyone in attendance agreed that the 2018 Vision captured well the intent of the school founders and builders (See box below).



Senior Kyle Petalas investigated how to make race cars safer in his Senior Project. After the Strategic Plan Launch, Ted Sizer, Coalition of Essential Schools and NCCES Founder, took time to inspect his application piece, the safety features he included in a race car he is building.



Senior Jason Brown, a member of the Strategic Plan Steering Committee, helps introduce the Strategic Plan at May meeting.

Ms. Davolos Harden went on to explain the three strategies the school will use to achieve the vision. “The most important strategy is to **ENSURE EXCELLENT PERSONALIZED INNOVATIVE EDUCATION**. This is our business – it’s the most important thing we do.” Key components in this strategy include delivering personalized learning informed by each student’s response to dynamic instruction, providing a safe, nurturing and joyful learning environment and continued development of the advisory program to help ensure the well being and high achievement of every student (See *Using Data to Personalize* and *Skill Academies* articles inside).

“We were very intentional in the development of the next strategy, **CREATE COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT**,” explained Ms. Davolos Harden. “This isn’t just about our

students – it’s about developing the partnerships and programs that will impact youth development across central Massachusetts.”

(continued on page 2 →→→)

#### Inside this issue:

<i>Commonwealth Corps</i>	2
<i>Using Data</i>	2
<i>Skill Academies</i>	2
<i>Newsletter Survey</i>	3
<i>Spring Photo Album</i>	3
<i>Wish List</i>	4
<i>Upcoming Events</i>	4

### 2018 Vision for North Central Charter Essential School

**We are an innovative public school that meets each and every student where they are as individuals and learners.**

**We do what it takes to inspire passionate, creative leaders and life-long learners who achieve personal greatness, are prepared for the future and engage with and give back to the world.**

## Commonwealth Corps

Late last summer, the school was selected to be one of the 36 sponsor sites for Governor Patrick's inaugural Commonwealth Corps program. The initiative, modeled after the Americorps Program, provides small stipends to individuals willing to make a major commitment to service. NCCES and Codman Academy in Dorchester are the only schools selected to host programs.

Our six Commonwealth Corps members include a retired math teacher, two recent college graduates, a college student and two people (a lawyer and a landscape architect) considering teaching as a career change. These individuals have served more than 3,500 hours at the school and in the community.

They have tutored and mentored small groups of students, assisted teachers in classrooms, set up an after school

Homework Club, connected seniors to senior project mentors, helped publicize First Thursday events for the city of Fitchburg, and facilitated a planning process for a nearby potential city park. Corps members organized and produced two special events for the school and community.

The Martin Luther King Day of Awakening Opportunity drew more than 200 people to the school on Saturday, January 17th. The event was one of the Inaugural Weekend service events and included opportunities for learning, service and reflection.

The Summer Opportunities Fair brought camps and community organizations to school to help make students aware of the various ways they could spend time during the summer months.



*A final assessment for students is the Senior Project. Ashley Laffita (left) explored how she could use the elements of interior design to create a mood in an office in her project. She re-decorated Ms. Linzey's guidance office (above) as her required application piece. Amy Newberg, owner of Design at 639 on Main Street in Fitchburg was her interior design mentor. Commonwealth Corps member, Rachelle Gendron helped Ashley and Amy connect.*

## Using Data to Personalize Program

NCCES is a school that personalizes the academic program for each of our students. We have systems in place that allow us to look at individuals to see how they improve over time in essential learning standards. This year, our math and English teachers have developed two "benchmark" tests using questions from past MCAS. These tests give our teachers and students a window into how they might fare on the Spring MCAS test and help teachers develop and adjust their teaching strategies to help student's better master essential skills.

On the 8<sup>th</sup> grade benchmark given in the fall only one student earned a three out of a high score of four and no student earned a four on the open response section of the test. This information

prompted our 8<sup>th</sup> grade English teacher, Ms. Jones to adapt her King Arthur unit so that each week after the class read a section of the novel, the students responded in writing to open response questions about the novel. As a result of this minor change in the class, **astrominical** gains were made by our 8<sup>th</sup> grade students. When they took the second benchmark test in March, open response scores shifted dramatically with almost 1/2 of the students now scoring a 3 or 4. This is the first time in our school's history of preparing students for the MCAS that we know BEFORE the test that we are on track and we know what we need to do to respond to the student's who are still struggling. This shift in the scores is **proof that practice does make perfect.**

## Skill Academies

NCCES students are choosing to spend their vacation time at school to build critical math and literacy skills. Thanks to funding from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, North Central Charter Essential School has developed a very successful vacation week skill intensive Academy.

Coming to school over April vacation was quite a sacrifice as this year most of February vacation week was cancelled to make up days missed during the December ice storm. Still, more than 30 students in grades 9-11 gave up their April vacation to work on math and literacy skills with their teachers. Students worked on math skills critical to success in algebra and writing and reading comprehension skills necessary for success on MCAS and in high school English classes. Additional Academies will take place in August.

## Strategic Plan Unveiled (continued from page 1)

Components of the strategy include developing and supporting a vibrant enrichment program, a corps of volunteers and institutional partnerships to impact personalized education program (See Commonwealth Corps article above).

The final strategy, **BUILD A HIGH PERFORMING ORGANIZATION**, "ties it altogether," according to Ms. Davolos Harden. "In order to sustain impactful student learning and effective youth development programs we need a team of leaders who have access to professional development and enrichment

opportunities with easy access to the data needed to inform decisions at all levels of the school." Another component of this strategy is to ensure the long-term financial sustainability of the school including finding a long-term affordable home and increasing resources available to the school.

After receiving many endorsements from those in attendance, Ms. Davolos Harden called on the school's founders and builders to help the school achieve this vision. Bob Hildreth agreed to step forward to lead the NCCES Foundation to

help the school reach its financial goals. The meeting ended by Bob Hildreth and Ron Ansin announcing a \$60,000 challenge grant to increase the number of donors and level of giving of existing donors to the NCCES Foundation.



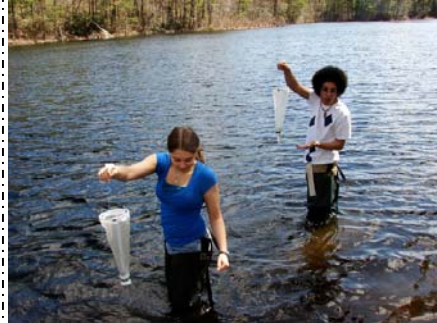
*Ron Ansin and Bob Hildreth listen to the Strategic Plan Launch with local educator, Donette Day and Principal, Tricia May just prior to making public their \$60,000 challenge grant.*



## Spring Photo Album



Education Secretary Paul Reville visited with students and staff in his January visit. When asked by an 11th grader if he supports charter schools, Sec. Reville replied, **“I support great schools, schools like this one which so clearly work and make a real impact on the students and teachers that they serve.”**



11th and 12th grade Environmental Science students celebrate spring by taking samples at Leominster State Forest (above). 9th graders couldn't wait for spring and launched their self-propelled putt-putt boats in the lobby in March (below).

Victoria Drury, a parent and Verizon employee, presents Ms. May with a \$750 check from Verizon's Volunteer Incentive Program, honoring Ms. Drury's 50 hours of volunteer service for the school. She's already well on her way to her next 50 hours!



The Drama Squad made it to the state semi-finals with their performance of **Rabbit Hole** in March (above).



8th grade humanities students pose after bringing to life the legend of King Arthur in Ms. Jones' class.



In May, **School House Rock Jr.** attracted all ages to the Black Box (below).

Our first ever Summer Opportunities Fair provided students a greater awareness of ways to spend their summer time away from school.



We fielded boys and girls lacrosse teams for the fourth year. Once the snow melted and the fields dried out the teams displayed their talents at Saima Park in Fitchburg, the school's home field.



M.L. King Day of Awakening Opportunity attracted more than 200 people to the school including Commonwealth Corps Commission Members, Lisa Wong, Waleska Lugo-DeJesus and Bob Ansin (above left and center). Attendees had the opportunity to learn to create a yarn doll and to sew as they helped create a quilt that was then donated (right).



### Important Newsletter Survey

What's the best way to keep our friends and families informed about school news? Please help us answer this question by providing your feedback. Just answer these questions and mail this page back to us in the envelope provided.

- How would you like to receive the Essential News?  
 via e-mail  via US postal mail  both
- How often would you like to receive news from us?  
 monthly  6-8 times per year  3-4 times per year
- What types of articles do you enjoy?

*Please help us update our records to include your e-mail information.*

*Please provide us your current e-mail address:*

**NAME:**

**E-Mail:**

**Please consider a special mid-year gift. Economic issues have affected many of our families who now need assistance from the NCCES Foundation to pay for athletic and field trip fees. Any donation is greatly appreciated. (Please use the form on back.)**



**NORTH  
CENTRAL  
CHARTER**  
essential  
school  
think • care • act

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Stephanie Davolos Harden, Executive Director

Patricia May, Principal

**We're on the Web.**  
Visit us at [www.ncces.org](http://www.ncces.org)

*NCCES is a public school where students are known personally, challenged intellectually, and expected to participate actively in their learning. Guided by its commitment to diversity and inclusiveness, the school seeks to send graduates into the world who **THINK** for themselves, **CARE** about others, and **ACT** creatively and responsibly.*

**Now Accepting Applications for Fall 2009!**

**WISH LIST**

**Strategic "Doers":** We are looking for people, young and old, to help us achieve our 2018 Vision. Currently, the Board's Development, Academic Success and Governance Committees could use more people. Opportunities also exist on the NCCES Foundation's board and for a soon-to-be formed Branding Committee to help better define the school's brand. If you'd like to help or want more information, contact Emily Austin-Bruns at 978-345-2701 Ext. 418 or [austin-brunse@ncces.org](mailto:austin-brunse@ncces.org).

**Flat Panel Monitors:** Upgrading a computer system and replacing a flat panel (LCD) monitor. We'd love your used (working) flat panel monitors to help us lower our energy costs.

**Color Laser Printer:** Our teachers would love to have a color printer for their work room.

**Alumni News:** Future newsletters will include alumni updates. What are you doing? What are you studying? Where have your travels taken you? Send your news to Carolyn Sellars ([sellarsc@ncces.org](mailto:sellarsc@ncces.org)).

**Pass It On:** After you finish reading this issue of Essential News, please pass it on to a friend or colleague who may be interested.

**UPCOMING EVENTS**

- June 8** Board of Trustees Meeting
- June 8** NCCES Foundation Meeting
- June 11** PTO Community BBQ
- June 15-16** Portfolio Days
- June 19** Last Day of 08-09 School Year
- June 22-26** 2nd week of Spring Academy
- June 22-July 17** Summer School
- August 3-7** Summer Academy
- August 17** New Teacher Orientation Begins
- August 26-27** Family Advisory Meetings

*Our website, [www.ncces.org](http://www.ncces.org), has the most up-to-date events information. Just click on "Calendar" on the home page.*

**I would like to help continue the excellent work at the North Central Charter Essential School.**

- NCCES Founder (\$2,500 and more)
- NCCES White Tiger (\$1,000 - \$2,499)
- NCCES Partner (\$500 - \$999)
- NCCES Advocate (\$100 - \$499)
- NCCES Sponsor (\$50 - \$99)
- NCCES Friend (\$25 - \$49)
- NCCES Associate (\$1- \$24)

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- My employer participates in a matching gift program.

**NCCES Foundation is deeply grateful for your support. Contributions to the NCCES Foundation are tax deductible.**