

PUBLIC CHARTER APPLICATION COVER PAGE

Check One: New Public Charter under Existing Local School Board New Public Charter District

Name of Public Charter School Montana Connections Academy

Local school district in which the public charter school will be physically located: Park City Schools

Contact Information for the Governing Board Chair

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PUBLIC CHARTER APPLICATION

Name of Public Charter School: Montana Connections Academy

Provide an executive summary with the general purpose and rationale for the creation of the public charter school.

Please see the Executive Summary beginning on page 7 of the document titled, “Montana Connections Academy Charter Application.”

Opening Date: August 20, 2024 Public Charter Term Length: 5 years

Grades to be served: K-12 (K-10 in Year 1; K-11 in Year 2; K-12 in Year 3)

Minimum Enrollment Per Year: 245 in Year 1; 470 in Year 2; 633 in Year 3; 734 in Year 4; 813 in Year 5

Planned Enrollment Per Year: 505 in Year 1; 960 in Year 2; 1280 in Year 3; 1485 in year 4; 1630 in Year 5

Maximum Enrollment Per Year: 505 in Year 1; 960 in Year 2; 1280 in Year 3; 1485 in year 4; 1630 in Year 5

For each year of the public charter term, indicate the number of students the public charter school plans to serve in each grade.

	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Total
Year 1	35	30	35	40	40	45	50	55	60	60	55	0	0	505
Year 2	60	55	60	65	70	75	90	95	100	105	100	85	0	960
Year 3	75	70	70	80	90	100	115	125	130	135	130	115	45	1280
Year 4	90	80	85	95	105	115	130	140	150	155	150	130	60	1485
Year 5	95	85	90	105	115	125	150	160	160	170	160	145	70	1630

ACADEMIC PROGRAM

We recognize that this section does not provide the space to fully and accurately respond to each of the questions below. Attachments and appendices are permitted. Please make sure to clearly state where corresponding responses are located.

1. State the public charter school’s mission and vision and describe why this initiative is important to the community it will serve.

Please see the Academic Program section, item #1 on page 9 of the document titled, “Montana Connections Academy Charter Application.”

2. Identify the targeted student population and the community the public charter school proposes to serve.

Please see the Academic Program section, item #2 that begins on page 11 of the document titled, “Montana Connections Academy Charter Application.”

3. Describe plans and timelines for student recruitment and enrollment, including lottery procedures.

Please see the Academic Program section, item #3 that begin on page 12 of the document titled,

“Montana Connections Academy Charter Application.”

4. Describe the public charter school’s academic program, specifically focusing on why it is innovative in your school district. Include plans to formally assess student achievement on an annual basis. Please see the Academic Program section, item #4 that begins on page 16 of the document titled, “Montana Connections Academy Charter Application.”
5. Describe any variances to existing standards that the public charter school requires to enhance educational opportunities. Please see the Academic Program section, item #5 that begins on page 32 of the document titled, “Montana Connections Academy Charter Application.”
6. Describe the instructional design, including the type of learning environment, class size and structure, curriculum overview, and teaching methods. Please see the Academic Program section, item #6 that begins on page 33 of the document titled, “Montana Connections Academy Charter Application.” Please also see Appendix E: School Handbook on page A-58 of the same document.
7. Describe plans for identifying and successfully serving students with disabilities, students who are English Language Learners, students who are academically challenged, and gifted students, including compliance with applicable laws and regulations. Please see the Academic Program section, item #7 that begins on page 53 of the document titled, “Montana Connections Academy Charter Application.”
8. Describe student discipline policies, including those for special education students. Please see the Academic Program section, item #8 that begins on page 69 of the document titled, “Montana Connections Academy Charter Application.” Please also see Appendix E: School Handbook on page A-58 of the same document.

SCHOOL GOVERNANCE

We recognize that this section does not provide the space to fully and accurately respond to each of the questions below. Attachments and appendices are permitted. Please make sure to clearly state where corresponding responses are located.

9. Describe the public charter school’s organizational chart that clearly presents the proposed organizational structure, including lines of authority and reporting between the governing board, staff, related bodies such as advisory bodies or parent and teacher councils, and external organizations that will play a role in managing the public charter school. Please see the School Governance section, item #9 that begins on page 74 of the document titled, “Montana Connections Academy Charter Application.”
10. Describe the roles and responsibilities of the governing board, the proposed leadership management team, and other entities shown in the organizational chart. Please see the School Governance section, item #10 that begins on page 78 of the document titled, “Montana Connections Academy Charter Application.”
11. Provide a staffing chart for the public charter school’s first year and a staffing plan for the term of the public charter school. Please see the School Governance section, item #11 on page 82 of the document titled, “Montana Connections Academy Charter Application.”

12. Detail the public charter school startup plan, identifying tasks, timelines, and responsible individuals. Please see the School Governance section, item #12 that begins on page 82 of the document titled, “Montana Connections Academy Charter Application.”
13. Describe the plans for recruiting and developing school leadership and staff. Please see the School Governance section, item #13 that begins on page 85 of the document titled, “Montana Connections Academy Charter Application.”
14. Describe the proposed leadership and teacher employment policies, including performance evaluation plans. Please see the School Governance section, item #14 that begins on page 92 of the document titled, “Montana Connections Academy Charter Application.”
15. State the proposed governing bylaws. Please see the School Governance section, item #15 that begins on page 95 of the document titled, “Montana Connections Academy Charter Application.” Please also see Appendix B: Park City School District Policies and Bylaws, on page A-8, and Appendix C: Advisory Board Structure, on page A-52 of the same document.
16. Explain any partnerships or contractual relationships central to the operations and mission of the public charter school. Please see the School Governance section, item #16 that begins on page 96 of the document titled, “Montana Connections Academy Charter Application.”
17. Provide the proposed calendar and sample daily schedule. Please see the School Governance section, item #17 that begins on page 98 of the document titled, “Montana Connections Academy Charter Application.” Please also see Appendix E: School Handbook on page A-58 of the same document for information on attendance.

BUSINESS OPERATIONS

We recognize that this section does not provide the space to fully and accurately respond to each of the questions below. Attachments and appendices are permitted. Please make sure to clearly state where corresponding responses are located.

18. Describe plans for providing transportation, food service, and all other significant operational or ancillary services. Please see the Business Operations section, item #18 on page 104 of the document titled, “Montana Connections Academy Charter Application.”
19. Describe cocurricular and extracurricular programs and how the programs will be funded and delivered. Please see the Business Operations section, item #19 that begins on page 104 of the document titled, “Montana Connections Academy Charter Application.”
20. Describe the proposed financial plan and policies, including financial controls and audit requirements. Please see the Business Operations section, item #20 that begins on page 108 of the document titled, “Montana Connections Academy Charter Application.” Please also see Appendix D: Startup and Operational Budgets and Statement of Cash Flows, on page A-55 of the same document.
21. Describe the insurance coverage that will be obtained.

Please see the Business Operations section, item #21 on page 109 of the document titled, “Montana Connections Academy Charter Application.”

22. Describe the startup and five-year budgets with clearly stated assumptions.
Please see the Business Operations section, item #22 that begins on page 110 of the document titled, “Montana Connections Academy Charter Application.” Please also see Appendix D: Startup and Operational Budgets and Statement of Cash Flows, on page A-55 of the same document.
23. Describe the startup and first year cash flow projections with clearly stated assumptions.
Please see the Business Operations section, item #23 that begins on page 113 of the document titled, “Montana Connections Academy Charter Application.” Please also see Appendix D: Startup and Operational Budgets and Statement of Cash Flows, on page A-55 of the same document.
24. Describe anticipated fundraising contributions and evidence, if applicable.
Please see the Business Operations section, item #24 on page 114 of the document titled, “Montana Connections Academy Charter Application.”
25. Describe the facilities plan, including backup or contingency plans.
Please see the Business Operations section, item #25 that begins on page 114 of the document titled, “Montana Connections Academy Charter Application.”

COMMUNITY SUPPORT AND NEED

We recognize that this section does not provide the space to fully and accurately respond to each of the questions below. Attachments and appendices are permitted. Please make sure to clearly state where corresponding responses are located.

26. Describe the specific evidence of significant community support.
Please see the Community Support and Need section, item #26 that begins on page 116 of the document titled, “Montana Connections Academy Charter Application.” Please also see Appendix A: Community Support, on page A-1 of the same document.
27. Describe the opportunities and expectations for parent involvement.
Please see the Community Support and Need section, item #27 that begins on page 120 of the document titled, “Montana Connections Academy Charter Application.”

NOT AN EXISTING LOCAL SCHOOL BOARD? COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION

We recognize that this section does not provide the space to fully and accurately respond to each of the questions below. Attachments and appendices are permitted. Please make sure to clearly state where corresponding responses are located.

1. Provide specific evidence that the applicant has sought from the local school board the creation of a school or program of the located school district serving the mission and vision of the proposed public charter school.

N/A

2. Provide specific evidence that the local school board declined to create the school or program and declined to submit a proposal for the creation of a public charter school to the Board of Public Education.

N/A

3. Provide a legal description of the property of the existing school district from which the boundaries of the public charter school district are proposed to be formed.

N/A

4. Share background information on the initial governing board members and, if identified, the proposed school leadership and management team.

N/A

Questions? Contact bpe@mt.gov



Public Charter Application for Montana Connections Academy, a Charter of Park City Schools

Submission Date: November 1, 2023

Submitted By:

Superintendent Dan Grabowska

Park City Schools

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Executive Summary

Provide an executive summary with the general purpose and rationale for the creation of the public charter school.

Montana Connections Academy (“MTCA” or “the School”), a charter of Park City Schools, will offer an innovative and unique online school, meet all statutory requirements, and address family demand in Montana to serve students for whom a high-quality, full-time online education is the best educational fit for their unique needs. The applicant for this application is the Park City School District’s Board of Education (“the Board”). The Board is comprised of five members who have been elected by the residents of the Park City School District.

Park City Schools is an innovative school district that has provided a variety of virtual options for students enrolled in Park City Schools such as online dual enrollment and Montana Digital Learning Academy courses, both prior to COVID and since COVID. Our superintendent of schools, Dan Grabowska, has been an active leader in both Montana and Idaho in online learning for over 20 years. His leadership created additional opportunities for students in Park City Schools. Due to the rural nature of Montana, Park City Schools believes that online learning has a critical role to play in creating access and equity for all students. Park City Schools plans to leverage our experience and leadership in online education and create a statewide, full-time online charter school partnered with an educational provider with over twenty years of experience in full-time online learning.

While the State has supplemental options for students, there is currently no comprehensive, statewide, equivalent option to our proposed full-time online charter school. In addition, this proposed charter school will also provide a variety of online career readiness opportunities for students statewide helping them achieve their goals both in their K-12 education and beyond.

Park City Schools believes that creating a charter school in our district will benefit students, the district, and the community by attracting home-school students in the Park City community to this new option as well as families who have open enrolled in neighboring districts. Park City Schools wants to be a district that can provide multiple options for students. In addition, our current students will also benefit from increased options with our proposed provider by providing expanded career options and replacement courses when the district is unable to identify a qualified teacher.

MTCA is not the equivalent of any current program offered in the entire state of Montana. It is unique and distinct from other offerings in the state. Its custom-designed courses offer parents the choices that they desire to give their children the best opportunity to succeed. While some other remote options may exist for individual classes, no other school or program in Montana offers students a full-time virtual education opportunity that is purpose built from the ground up. Our school is unique and unlike any other program in Montana.

MTCA is dedicated to providing a high quality, full-time online option to children of all backgrounds. Students whose instructional needs will be effectively met by MTCA include students whose families seek direct involvement in their education; students who are medically homebound due to illness or disability; exceptional students who are far ahead of or far behind their peers in school; students pursuing artistic or athletic careers; students who require a flexible school schedule; students in group homes or institutions; students who have been bullied; and students at risk of academic failure, who may particularly benefit from intensive, personalized instruction.

MTCA will serve students throughout Montana eligible to enroll under Montana law, including general education students, students with special needs, students academically behind, at-risk students, gifted

students, and English Learners. It is anticipated that the School will serve highly mobile students and students who are interested in college and career readiness, and will help students be successful during the time period that a full-time online school is needed.

Students learn best when lessons match their interests and abilities. Access to a wide variety of courses, some of which are not offered in many traditional schools, provides students with an opportunity to explore their interests and enhance their abilities. MTCA's program will offer students the chance to build their individual strengths and interests in a familiar and safe setting while still connected to a larger learning community. Here are a few of the driving forces behind the School's unique approach to education and what makes MTCA stand out:

- Tuition-Free Virtual Education – The School will offer a tuition-free public online education at no cost to students and their families.
- High-Quality Curriculum – The curriculum and instruction meet standards at the state and national level while also integrating the best materials, texts, and resources available.
- Exceptional Teachers – Dedicated teachers are at the foundation of the MTCA experience. Teachers will be certified in Montana and trained to excel in online teaching. Students have opportunities to work 1:1 with teachers for personalized instruction.
- College and Career & Technical Education Resources – Students will have access to a robust catalog of CTE courses for early career exploration. As students progress through their courses and participate in experiential components of the program, they will be able to earn badges based on the correlation of World Economic Forum standards to school curriculum and National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) Career Readiness Competencies.
- Individualized Learning – Each student has unique abilities and performs better when receiving individualized attention in a nurturing learning environment. Teachers identify individual students' interests, learning preferences, and skills and encourage personal development, giving each student the best opportunity to succeed. An individualized learning approach means that students can accelerate their pace on material they grasp easily and receive extra attention in areas of weakness.
- Parent-Supported Learning – A parent, guardian, or other responsible adult serves as their student's virtual school Learning Coach, choosing to be closely involved in their child's daily education and take on an active role in supporting and encouraging their child. The Learning Coach is supported with resources and training to encourage caregivers in the learning process.
- Easy-to-Use Technology – Through the Education Management System (EMS), an online learning platform, parents/guardians and students can easily access curriculum, review grades, and schedule lessons. The EMS is user-friendly and provides students with access to a collaborative learning experience anywhere they can connect to the Internet.
- Socialization and Community – LiveLesson®, a real-time, interactive web-conferencing tool, allows students to meet regularly in a virtual setting and gives classmates the opportunity to share ideas, compare experiences, and have fun learning together. Students can also meet others with similar interests through online clubs and activities. MTCA will also offer in-person gatherings, activities, and field trips so that students have a chance to interact outside of the virtual classroom.
- Strategic Partnership – The Board has chosen to partner with Connections Education LLC dba Pearson Virtual Schools USA (Pearson) as the Education Management Organization (EMO). Students will benefit from a top-quality, proven curriculum from Pearson aligned to the Montana Content Standards. The Board, supported by its partner Pearson, will be capable of providing comprehensive learning experiences to all its students as a public online charter school.

By year three, MTCA will serve students in grades K-12 and will implement the proven Pearson online school model, incorporating its recognized and award-winning curriculum focusing on and supporting academic achievement for all students. The online learning model and the curriculum, as described in this charter school application, are currently implemented in 45 online schools in 29 states throughout the country. The students and families of Montana will benefit from the best practices culled from implementing this proven core model of online learning over the past 21 years.

Through this unique new school, students who need a high-quality, proven public school model from home or on the road will be able to access a whole-school experience with Montana-certified teachers and specialized supports for all learners.

The School will provide a rigorous, comprehensive learning solution for Montana students seeking an alternative to the traditional brick-and-mortar setting:

- Individualized learning opportunities and pacing, accommodating a range of learning preferences, balanced with optimum interaction;
- High-quality teacher-student interaction and individualized teacher attention;
- Online courses that comply with Montana Content Standards, include active learning elements, and provide instructional differentiation, including textual, visual, auditory and hands-on;
- An environment that is free of distractions, with access to content 24/7;
- Flexibility for scheduling, allowing students to learn when they learn best;
- An environment that is safe for students who have been bullied in brick-and-mortar settings, have health conditions, or have immunocompromised family members; and
- A continuity of learning every day, without interruption, at home.

While full-time online schools are not the answer for every student, they are an important solution for a growing number of students and families in the state. There is no equivalent option in Montana. With the establishment of this school, we will be able to help students in Montana maximize their potential and meet the highest performance standards.

ACADEMIC PROGRAM

1. State the public charter school's mission and vision and describe why this initiative is important to the community it will serve.

1. Mission & Vision

Park City Schools is dedicated to promoting Active Learners, Active Leaders. Through a collaboration of Park City Schools, the community and businesses, all children in Park City School District, grades Pre-K through 12, will be safe and supported while learning and growing to be Active Learners and Active Leaders so they can graduate ready for college, careers, and/or the workforce. This proposed charter school will continue to build upon this focus with its mission. The mission of Montana Connections Academy, a charter of Park City Schools, is to empower Montana students to thrive in today's ever-changing world by learning in a way that is best for their individual needs in a flexible environment. Montana Connections Academy offers eligible K-12 students an alternative to the traditional classroom where they can maximize their potential and meet the highest performance standards in a uniquely individualized learning program with high parental involvement and access to high-quality certified teachers.

The vision of Montana Connections Academy, a charter of Park City Schools, is to create generations of adaptable learners equipped with the skills, confidence, and optimism to thrive no matter where their

learning journey takes them as Active Learners and Active Leaders. This mission and vision provide students statewide with an educational opportunity that is not available at their zoned school.

Importance of This Initiative to the Community

This initiative is important to the community it seeks to serve because there is a need for full-time online learning to serve students for whom a traditional brick-and-mortar school is not the best option. Students who suffer from anxiety or are experiencing a serious illness may need a full-time online school. Other students who may benefit are students who have been bullied or need more flexibility in their schedule.

Park City Schools has had an interest in online learning options and believes that a full-time online option is necessary for Montana's students. The Board is aware of no equivalent public school or program in Montana that offers students the ability to learn in a fully remote environment with a high-quality option, distinguishing itself from emergency learning. In the last five years, over 800 families in Montana have inquired about online school options and specifically the Connections Academy program.

Our proposed school, Montana Connections Academy, will meet a need among Montana families that is not being met by current options. The School is not the equivalent of any other school in Montana, and will offer students in all grades a wrap-around whole-school experience with robust customized course offerings, certified teachers, clubs and activities, and the opportunity to focus on career readiness with the ability to earn badges and real-life skills—all in a flexible technology-enabled environment.

The proposed school will meet students where they are and will seek to enroll students who are not being served by the current options available to them. Dropout rates have risen for American Indian students by 3.8% since 2019-20 to present, and 1.1% for White/Non-Hispanic students over the same timeline. Our proposed school would aim to provide a new opportunity for these students. Data also shows that following the school years affected by COVID-19, over 700 students have left the public school system and have chosen to enroll in either private schools or homeschool. These are students whose parents have chosen to remove them from the public school system. We believe MTCA will provide them with a unique and new public school option that they have never had before that will be accessible statewide.

Finally, this initiative is important to addressing Montana's ongoing teacher shortage. Recent reporting by NPR¹ stated that, "data from the National Teacher and Principal Survey show Montana schools are struggling to fill nearly 60% of open jobs." This is a statewide challenge that MTCA can help address. By employing teachers and educators who work remotely, MTCA can tap into a group of teachers and educators who desire to help the next generation of Montanans learn, grow, and succeed. These educators will now have the flexibility to share their love of learning with others yet be able to balance other challenges that may have prevented them from joining a traditional classroom.

¹ Source: <https://www.npr.org/2023/10/03/1203416462/in-some-montana-schools-virtual-teachers-fill-in-as-educator-shortage-drags-on>

2. Identify the targeted student population and the community the public charter school proposes to serve.

2. Targeted Student Population & Community

Targeted Student Population

MTCA will serve students throughout the state who are eligible to enroll under Montana law, including general education students, students with learning or cognitive disabilities, at-risk students, accelerated students, and English learners. It is anticipated that the School may also serve highly mobile students and will help these students be successful during the time period that a full-time online school is needed.

MTCA is dedicated to providing a high-quality, full-time online option to children of all backgrounds. The Park City Schools Board is committed to equity, and the MTCA student population is expected to mirror the demographics of Montana public schools. Therefore, based on the most recently available data, the School anticipates 77.75% White students, 10.92% American Indian, 5.38% Hispanic, 0.77% Black, 0.73% Asian, 0.2% Pacific Islander, 4.25% more than one race, 2.5% English Learners, and approximately 13.4% Students with Disabilities. Thirty-nine percent of MTCA students will meet federal free and reduced meals (FARM) guidelines.

Through this unique model, the School will be tailor-made for a diverse array of students who may benefit from a quality option to the traditional brick-and-mortar classroom, including:

- Students whose families seek more involvement in their child's education;
- Students who are medically homebound due to illness or disability;
- Students who are immunocompromised and are concerned about health conditions outside of the home environment;
- Exceptional students who are far ahead of or far behind their peers in school;
- Students pursuing artistic or athletic interests or career development opportunities requiring a flexible schedule;
- Students desiring a unique educational model focused on career readiness and lifelong learning;
- Students who require a flexible school schedule;
- Students with special learning needs;
- Students who have been bullied;
- Students who are at risk of academic failure, who may particularly benefit from intensive, personalized instruction; and
- Students who desire a comprehensive, robust full-time online school experience.

While full-time online schools are not the answer for every student, they are an important solution for a growing number of students and families in Montana. With the establishment of MTCA, more students will be empowered to meet their unique educational and life goals through flexible pacing, individualized learning, and a safe learning environment.

Community

Superintendent Grabowska's 20 years of leadership and teaching experience in online learning made the formation of an online charter school, led by the Park City School District, an easy decision. Park City

Schools has a long history in providing online options to students and believes that it can provide a unique option both in the local community and statewide. The Park City Board, community, and teachers including the Montana Education Association representative are supportive of this charter option. As a statewide online public charter school, MTCA will seek to form deep relationships with community organizations across the state. The support of community organizations will be essential to the success of the School. The Board has prioritized creating and sustaining partnerships with organizations that complement the School's mission. The Board has received support throughout the state for its educational plan. In fact, during the compressed October application timeframe, MTCA received 82 statements of support from individuals and entities located in 21 counties across the state. Thirteen in-person information sessions were held across the state to help inform interested students and families about this unique educational model as well as making an online version of its presentation available through its website, <https://www.connectionsacademy.com/bring-connections-academy-to-montana/>. MTCA will continue to develop community connections via its website even after the application is submitted. The School will take full advantage of valuable community partnerships to ensure the School reflects the needs and wishes of regional communities.

The need for a flexible, full-time online education came up multiple times in conversations with parents, teachers, and community members. Some parents wanted that flexibility because their children were progressing beyond their classmates; others wanted flexibility because of extracurricular opportunities and interests that their children were involved in. One parent said that her daughter has dealt with significant anxiety in traditional in person schools, and that they were no longer an option for her. Teachers who had left the profession spoke about the ability to teach again because they would be able to do so remotely.

3. Describe plans and timelines for student recruitment and enrollment, including lottery procedures.

3.a Student Recruitment Plans and Timelines

Upon approval of the School, MTCA will begin actively recruiting families that represent and promote the diverse, demographic, and socioeconomic range present throughout the state of Montana. The School will publicize to attract a sufficient pool of eligible students. The outreach mix will include public relations, online media, and organic grassroots efforts. This outreach will cover the varied geographies and diverse students and families throughout Montana. The outreach strategy may shift throughout the year to maximize awareness of this new public school option.

A variety of means will be used to inform families about the School's services and provide them an opportunity to enroll:

- Information Sessions: MTCA will conduct information sessions to share information about the School and respond to questions from families. The School will educate families about its model, including information on its curriculum, teaching methods, technology resources, and testing requirements.
- Website: A website specific to MTCA will be created and maintained. Once the School is approved, the website will contain information about the School, its approach, its curriculum, leadership, teachers, testing requirements, the School's performance on standardized tests (when available), and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) and their answers. The site will also

include enrollment information and procedures, information sessions schedules, and other useful tools for prospective students and their families.

- Family Enrollment Counselors: There will be a dedicated team of family enrollment counselors that can speak to families about the School, answer questions they may have, and help guide them through the enrollment process.
- Media Outreach: MTCA will make use of media to inform families and students about the School and share family/school news.
- Referrals/Word of Mouth: As MTCA grows, it anticipates that an increasing number of families who come to the School will enroll due to positive feedback received from their friends, community members, and other school families.
- Online Outreach: Families will be able to find and gain more information about MTCA through families doing searches on Google or other browsers, social media and digital display.

Recruitment Timelines

Upon approval of the School, MTCA will begin actively recruiting families that represent the diverse, demographic, and socioeconomic range throughout the state. Outreach to families will help drive awareness and interest of the School to attract a sufficient pool of eligible students through various means to inform potential students, their Caretakers, and other interested parties about the School. Public Information Campaign (PIC) initiatives, strategies, and tactics may shift throughout each Academic Year of the term depending on demand, changing behaviors, and data review. The Board plans for recruitment to begin in February of the school launch year with the activities described previously. MTCA will have an open application period to be specified during the second semester of each school year for the following school year. The dates of the open application period will be announced on the School's website. During this period, students/caretakers who are interested in enrolling must begin by completing either the online registration form which will be made available on the School's website or an offline registration form.

3.b Student Enrollment Plans and Timelines

MTCA hopes to responsibly grow from 505 students (Year 1 goal) to 1,630 students (Year 5 goal) or more in its initial Charter term through a combination of parent outreach, comparatively high student retention rates (online school retention rates tend to be lower than brick-and-mortar schools due to the mobility of its student population), and word-of-mouth recommendations and referrals by current families. The Board has a responsible plan for school growth (balancing the desire to serve as many students as possible each academic year with the quality and academic focus of the School) that positions both the students and the School for future success. MTCA will serve students in grades K-10 in Year 1, grades K-11 in Year 2, and grades K-12 in Year 3 with seniors being limited to previous MTCA 11th graders.



Projected Number of Students Per Grade/Grouping

	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29
K	35	60	75	90	95
1	30	55	70	80	85
2	35	60	70	85	90
3	40	65	80	95	105
4	40	70	90	105	115
5	45	75	100	115	125
6	50	90	115	130	150
7	55	95	125	140	160
8	60	100	130	150	160
9	60	105	135	155	170
10	55	100	130	150	160
11		85	115	130	145
12			45	60	70
Total	505	960	1280	1485	1630

The Board plans to contract with Pearson to implement and conduct the enrollment process on behalf of MTCA, in accordance with enrollment and withdrawal policies and procedures adopted by the Board, consistent with local, state, and federal law. The enrollment policies will be reviewed and approved by the Board as part of finalizing the School Handbook.

A successful regionalized enrollment model will be used to provide dedicated support and customized services, including:

- Regular communication with school leadership on enrollment strategy and resolution of escalated issues.
- Montana-specific training for all enrollment and placement personnel as well as refresher trainings.
- Robust quality monitoring to make sure the services and support provided to MTCA families and students are accurate and comprehensive so that staff supporting the School are acting as an extension of MTCA’s team.

MTCA will abide by all applicable federal, state, and local statutes, policies, and guidelines for student enrollment and will not impose enrollment requirements that are inconsistent with these policies and guidelines. These policies and guidelines include compliance with the McKinney-Vento Act regarding students experiencing homelessness. The School Leader or their designee will serve as the liaison for homeless students. Students who meet the definition of homeless will be enrolled without delay despite the inability to provide required documents, such as proof of residency. Students in foster care will also be immediately enrolled, in accordance with Title I requirements for educational stability and continuity.

MTCA students who enroll in the School will remain enrolled through twelfth grade, unless there is a voluntary withdrawal, mandatory withdrawal pursuant to state law, expulsion, graduation, court-ordered placement, IEP team placement, or other applicable laws.

Lottery Open Application Procedures

The Board-approved lottery policy, important dates, and information about capacity will be posted on the public website and available to parents during the registration process. According to the Montana charter law, “a public charter school shall enroll all students who wish to attend the school, unless the number of students exceeds the capacity of a program, class, grade level, or building.” MTCA is an online school and anticipates being able to serve all students who wish to enroll in the School. In the event that a lottery is needed, a lottery will be held in accordance with state law.

MTCA will prioritize the enrollment of certain students in accordance with Montana law. Enrollment preference will be given to:

- Students who were enrolled in the School the previous school year, beginning in Year 2
- Siblings of students already enrolled in the School, beginning in Year 2
- Children of the School's governing board and full-time employees, limited to no more than 10% of the School's total student population

MTCA is committed to maximizing open enrollment within its annual maximum enrollment parameters, while carefully considering student/teacher ratio to ensure students are provided with quality instruction and support as needed. Each year the School will conduct an open application period as described below.

The open application period for the following school year will take place in the spring. The dates of the open application period and potential lottery will be announced on the School’s website and as otherwise required by law. The open application period will continue for at least 30 days. No applicants will be enrolled during the open application period. During this period applicants who are interested in enrolling must complete the online registration form, which will be made available on the School’s website under “Enrollment.” At the conclusion of the open application period, the School will determine the total number of new applicants eligible for the lottery by grade level or cluster and which applicants are eligible for the enrollment preferences as set forth in the lottery policy.

If the School is not oversubscribed and no lottery is needed, the families will be notified and the students will be enrolled as they complete the enrollment process.

If the School is over-subscribed at the end of the open application period, a lottery will be held:

Upon accounting for enrollment preferences of certain students as set forth in the lottery policy, if there are more completed applications than available spaces at the end of the application period, a random lottery will be conducted in accordance with the lottery policy. The lottery may be conducted by grade level or by grade clusters as follows:

- Grades K-5
- Grades 6-8
- Grades 9-12

The order in which the grade levels or grade clusters are drawn, and the total number of students selected for each grade level or grade cluster, may vary each year in consideration of the School’s overall enrollment parameters, the expected number of returning students and any of their eligible siblings who complete an enrollment application during the open application period, and/or other operational factors.

To ensure a random lottery without the possibility of human bias and error, the School will utilize a computer-generated randomization. The program will randomly select a student name from the pool of enrollment applicants for a specific grade cluster until the number of available spaces are filled, or the pool of enrollment applications is exhausted.

As each student in a grade cluster is selected, siblings of that student who have also completed the applicable registration will be accepted if a space in their grade cluster is available.

The parents/legal guardians of selected students will receive an email notification within five (5) business days after the lottery and must confirm student attendance by completing all enrollment requirements within ten (10) business days after the email was sent. A parent/legal guardian who has not confirmed attendance within the time given will forfeit their student's space to the next eligible student on the waitlist.

When all available spaces in a grade cluster have been filled, students not selected in the lottery will be placed on a waitlist in the order in which they were selected. The parents/legal guardians of students who are not selected will receive an email notification within five (5) business days after the lottery that their students are on the waitlist. These students will be given an opportunity to enroll as space becomes available in their respective grade cluster. The parents/legal guardians will be subsequently notified when an opening in the student's grade cluster becomes available. The parent/legal guardian must confirm student attendance by completing all enrollment requirements within ten (10) business days after the date of notification of an available space or will forfeit their student's space to the next eligible student on the waitlist.

4. Describe the public charter school's academic program, specifically focusing on why it is innovative in your school district. Include plans to formally assess student achievement on an annual basis.

4.a Academic Program & Why It Is Innovative

The academic program is based on an innovative, online instructional model that does not currently exist in Montana. It incorporates key facets including 1) a student-centered instructional model, 2) counselors, and 3) student motivation. An individualized and supported educational program facilitates the development of self-direction and personal responsibility among its students. Through this instructional model, MTCA will develop students who are self-motivated, competent, lifelong learners. MTCA is not the equivalent of any other model in Montana due to the following elements included in the Connections Academy model:

- 1) A Student-Centered Instructional Model: The Montana Connections Academy instructional model relies on the support of appropriately certified teachers, supportive Learning Coaches, and a high quality, Montana standards-aligned curriculum. Each student will have a staff of experts, including Montana-certified teachers, working together to leverage the School's myriad of resources — technological, instructional, and interpersonal — for success. Learning Coaches are also encouraged to, and typically function as, an integral part of the student's learning team.

Appropriately Certified Teachers: Student learning benefits from committed educators and involved parents who provide total support. Each student will have one or more certified Montana teachers specially trained in teaching in an online environment, the Pearson curriculum, college and career readiness programs, and specific instructional methods.

In each of the elementary and middle school grade levels or high school core subjects, students will be taught by an appropriately certified teacher with expertise in a particular grade level or content area. Teachers will work closely with each student on a one-on-one basis using innovative technology tools. The teacher will be responsible for teaching, evaluating assignments and work products, providing instructional assistance, assigning and scoring assessment activities, and providing feedback on the student's performance.

Based on a student's demonstrated mastery of the material, teachers will add, expand, or replace assignments; they will also grade students in each subject, and make promotion or retention decisions. Depending on the needs of the learner, teacher direct contact — via telephone, LiveLesson session, and email — with the student and Learning Coach may be as frequent as several times a day, and at minimum twice per week. Teachers view the student's attendance, participation, and performance on a daily basis via the EMS teacher's dashboard on their home page. Teachers will not wait to be contacted; they will be proactive participants in their students' learning plans. Teachers in online schools often comment that they understand their students better in the online environment than in a traditional classroom since they work with students one-on-one.

Supportive Learning Coaches: Each student has a Learning Coach (a parent, extended family member, or trusted adult designated by the parent/guardian) who is encouraged to work in person with the student. Typically, a Learning Coach helps keep students motivated and on track and regularly communicates with the students' teachers. At the high school level, the Learning Coach is less involved with daily instruction but is encouraged to continue serving as an important supervisory role for the student.

A High-Quality, Standards-Aligned Curriculum: In addition to meeting Montana Content Standards, Pearson courses comply with the National Standards for Quality Online Learning. Each course includes unique and developmentally appropriate active learning activities that address diverse learning styles and preferences, including textual, visual, auditory, and hands-on. The developmentally appropriate curriculum increases its integration of technology as students advance through the grades.

- 2) Counselors: Students in middle school and high school will be assigned a counselor who provides an extra layer of monitoring for the whole student. School counselors implement programming to help students apply academic achievement strategies, manage emotions, practice interpersonal life skills, support college and career readiness, as well as discuss plans for post-secondary (higher education, military, work force) options while monitoring the student's completion of state-specific graduation requirements. Additionally, Career Coaches will work with the School staff to help students navigate all of aspects of their College and Career preparation journey, to include helping identify experiential opportunities most beneficial to students based on their interest and aptitude, and compiling portfolios that will set the students up for immediate success following graduation, whether that be enrolling in college or a trade school or entering the job market.
- 3) Student Motivation²: Teachers are trained to apply three engagement strategies to their instruction to create a motivational online learning environment: 1) making instruction fun and engaging, 2) providing a safe way to respond, and 3) helping students succeed.

² <https://www.connectionsacademy.com/support/resources/article/the-fundamentals-of-online-classroom-motivation>

The School will employ a multi-tiered instructional model so that every student has access to the resources they need to be successful: Tier I Core Curriculum with Differentiation, Tier II Supplemental Instructional Supports (two to three times per week), and Tier III Supplemental Instructional Supports (four to five times per week). Student Support and IEP teams will meet regularly to develop an intervention plan and strategies for improvement for students who are struggling.

Unique Elements of the Program

MTCA's instructional methods, educational philosophy, and program will include unique elements from the Connections Academy model. The academic program of the virtual school will utilize innovation and flexibility and enable the charter school to meet rigorous performance standards by meeting students where they are at, personalizing instruction, and providing the flexibility for students to learn when and where they learn best. Connections Academy is committed to continual improvement and accordingly, its systems and techniques are routinely updated to incorporate best practices and lessons learned ensuring the needs of students and families are being met. The proposed program includes the following unique elements:

- **Benchmark or Progress Monitoring Assessments:** The School will administer progress monitoring assessments in the beginning, middle, and end of the school year. These assessments allow for greater personalization of instruction and the ability to track student growth. The School may utilize a variety of benchmark assessments, based on the grade level and subject area, taking into account any state or authorizer requirements and state-specific learning standards. One potential benchmark assessment is Renaissance Star 360®, a comprehensive pre-K–12 interim and formative assessment suite. Renaissance Star 360® delivers the valid, reliable screening, progress monitoring, and student growth data educators need to make informed decisions.³ Renaissance Star 360 enables greater student growth as teachers lead students toward mastery of state-specific learning standards for reading and math. Acadience Reading assessments assess core early literacy skills and help teachers identify children at risk for reading difficulties and determine the skills to target for instructional support. (Note: Based upon state law or rules, these assessments may change.)
- **Career Readiness & Badging Focus:** The School will offer a program designed to increase employment opportunities and/or college readiness for its students. The School's unique badging program is designed to increase engagement, motivate students, provide career and life skills opportunities, and improve academic outcomes. These badges will consist of two areas: 1) Exploration badges, focused on Career Education, and 2) Engagement Badges, focused on school culture and building responsible citizens. Students will be encouraged to and celebrated for earning Engagement Badges designed to recognize the importance of participation and engagement in the online learning experience.
- **Collaboration Among Students:** Using technology-enabled LiveLesson sessions, teachers will group students in break-out rooms to allow collaboration. Teachers then "visit" each room to observe student collaboration, redirect, etc. This audio/video web conferencing tool allows teachers the flexibility to group students, conduct small group instruction, utilize a whiteboard for illustration, and allows students to work together in a collaborative space.

³ <https://www.renaissance.com/products/star-assessments/>

Additionally, for each section of students that a teacher teaches in a course, the teacher will create a section message board. On the section message board, teachers will assign additional collaboration opportunities or have students work together in the online space to share information, post documents, and respond to one another. Students are graded on both the content of the projects and their participation in collaborative activities.

- Curriculum-Based Assessments: Teachers conduct curriculum-based assessments (CBAs), via telephone conversation or through one-on-one LiveLesson sessions, as a quick and effective way to gather information on students' understanding of concepts. CBAs are used to validate a student's understanding of concepts against the collected formative data within the EMS and identify areas where they may need additional support or practice. CBAs also assist teachers in verifying that students are doing their own work, pinpoint strengths and weaknesses in student mastery of concepts, and verify that student learning is on track.
- Education Management System (EMS): The Pearson Online Classroom EMS will be the platform for organizing and supporting MTCA's entire educational environment. This web-based software will deliver assignments and track activities (whether conducted virtually or offline) while monitoring the completion of individual lessons as well as mastery of discrete skills and knowledge, all under the watchful eye of administrators, teachers, and Learning Coaches. The EMS operates within a secure, robust technology infrastructure protecting data from loss and intrusion while maintaining a safe environment.

Students, teachers, administrators, and Learning Coaches access the EMS to organize, document, and interact, ensuring a robust level of engagement. The EMS is continually updated and improved upon for the success of schools and families. All new releases and updates of the EMS are automatically provided.

- Email: The email system is securely located within the EMS. Students and teachers use it to communicate with each other, protecting them from spam, contact from those outside of the EMS, and other mainstream email issues.
- Interactive Reviews: Interactive reviews are additional practice opportunities embedded in the curriculum and serve to give students targeted feedback on concepts and skills.
- Learning Coach: A parent, extended family member, or similarly qualified adult designated by the parent/guardian will work in person with the student as a Learning Coach under the guidance of the credentialed teacher. The Learning Coach and student interact with the teacher via telephone, email message, LiveLesson sessions, and in-person meetings. MTCA provides a unique login and ongoing training, support, and resources to help the Learning Coach carry out this important role.
- LiveLesson® Session: A real-time, interactive web conferencing tool, LiveLesson sessions allow teachers to work synchronously and directly with students using voice-over IP, chat, electronic whiteboard, and shared web surfing. LiveLesson sessions are recorded so students can watch or review at their convenience, providing students and families the flexibility they desire.
- Multi-tiered Instruction: The school employs a multi-tiered instruction framework based upon the Multi-tiered System of Supports (MTSS) model that deeply links curriculum, standards, assessments, and interventions that have a direct impact on student mastery and resulting standardized test performance. Through this model every student has access to the

resources they need to be successful: Tier I Core Curriculum with Differentiation, Tier II Targeted Instructional Supports, and Tier III Intensive Instructional Supports. Student Support teams (SST) meet regularly to develop an intervention plan and strategies for improvement for students who need more frequent, targeted learning support.

- Personalized Performance Learning™ (PPL): This instructional process creates a unique learning experience for each student. During enrollment, academic placement advisors and school counselors will review students' past records and performance to properly place them in MTCA.
- Graduation Plan: Within the EMS, the Graduation Planning tool assists school staff and families to define and track graduation requirements tailored to the diploma type and student post-graduation goals.
- State Testing: As a public school, students will participate in required state testing, including the SBA and/or MAST for ELA and Math in grades 3-8; MSA for Science in grades 5 and 8; the ACT with writing for grade 11 (Math, English, Writing, Reading, and Science); the MSAA and AMSA as appropriate; and all other assessments depending upon grade level, or course enrollment, as required by law. ACCESS for ELs will also be administered to students in grades K-12 who are identified as second language learners annually according to the testing schedule. This measures student achievement in the following areas: Reading (Grammar, Reading Comprehension), Listening, Speaking, and Writing.
- Student Engagement Process: MTCA tracks and reports ongoing student progress based on quantitative data generated by the EMS. Staff members analyze attendance, pace, performance, progress, assessment completion and the rate and frequency of teacher contact. Student status for pace, performance and progress is displayed for teachers in the EMS on the Teacher Dashboard. Additionally, Learning Coaches have real-time access to their student's attendance, progress, and performance data through the EMS.
- Synchronous Contact: In a virtual school setting, synchronous contact is defined as a real-time interaction between teachers and students. Synchronous communication through LiveLesson session is a catalyst for providing interaction and builds relationships between teachers and students. Teachers will schedule LiveLesson sessions, in addition to other synchronous interaction (e.g., phone calls) for students and will document all synchronous contact with a student within the EMS.
- Teachers: MTCA's instructional staff will be comprised of trained Montana-certified teachers, as required by law, who are also specially trained in online delivery and personalized instruction and maintain a one-on-one relationship with each student. Teachers work from either the School's administrative office or their home office to deliver instruction to a virtual classroom of students through highly interactive, technology-facilitated communication tools. Moreover, teachers provide quality, timely feedback on assignments and assessments.
- Tutorials: Tutorials are interactive, asynchronous graphic/video/audio tutorials, and are incorporated into lessons to provide students a dynamic, fun, and engaging way to learn the concepts they need in order to master learning objectives and standards.

Resources for College and Career Exploration and Readiness

This School also plans to add a College and Career Exploration and Readiness component. This offering will be built on the following integrated components and resources for MTCA:

- Career Exploration and Community Platform: A series of interest and aptitude assessments will connect students with exploration opportunities that align with their individual results. These opportunities include Career Communities through which students are exposed to a variety of jobs and experts within their clusters of interest, along with opportunities to identify and pursue individual topics of interest and activity exploration.
- CTE Courses: In addition to the experiential components of the career program, students will have access to career-focused courses that can help prepare them to earn industry certifications across different Career Clusters.
- The Experiential Career Network: Through a series of strategic industry and college partnerships, the School will facilitate work-based learning opportunities that expose students to authentic post-secondary experiences and guide students to informed decisions about their futures beyond high school.
- Career Coaching: Career Coaches will work directly with the School staff to help students navigate all aspects of their College and Career preparation journey, including helping with identifying experiential opportunities most beneficial to students based on their interest and aptitude, and compiling portfolios that will set the students up for immediate success following graduation, whether enrolling in college, a trade school, or entering the job market. The Career Coaches will facilitate additional training for school staff to support student success and their career and college goals.
- Tri-Credit Opportunity: Through a unique partnership with Coursera, the global online learning platform, and a network of college and university partners (including those affiliated with Acadeum the largest course sharing network in higher education) learners will have access to tri-credit opportunities — the chance to simultaneously earn high school credit, industry certifications, and college credit. True college and career readiness is all about making meaningful connections to learning/skill building and employment, and this partnership is a "connector" in the truest sense as it will help bring career experiences to students, connecting them to both college and employment opportunities immediately upon graduation and helping them avoid the debt of previous generations.
- Skills Badging: As students in grades 6 through 12 progress and participate in experiential components of the program, they will be able to earn badges based on correlation to the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) Career Readiness Competencies through Pearson's Credly badging partnership. Digital badges sit at the heart of a new paradigm for the education industry, allowing students to showcase their (validated) skills, interests and accomplishments to colleges and potential employers.

The screenshot shows a user interface for 'Amanda Demo's Career Portal'. The main content area is divided into four quadrants: 'Investigate and Explore' (with a lightbulb icon), 'Find and Connect' (with a group of people icon), 'My Badges' (with a gold medal icon), and 'Certification' (with a certificate icon). Each quadrant has a brief description and a right-pointing arrow. On the right side, there is a 'My Teachers' sidebar with sections for 'HOMEROOM' (listing Claire Robertson), 'CAREER COACH' (listing Career Coach), and 'COURSES' (listing Language Arts 7 A and Discovering Music III). The footer contains the Pearson logo, copyright information, and a 'Contact Us' section with an email address and phone number.

Interactive tools, assessments, and real-world exploration will help students discover career pathways.

Students will have opportunities to connect with a network of industry professionals.

Career Coaches will support and advise students and families with all aspects of the program through coaching sessions and other outreach.

Through Credly, students will be able to earn, view, and share badges based on established program criteria.

CTE courses will equip students with the knowledge and skills needed to prepare for national and industry certifications.

Figure 1. MTCA's Career Exploration and Readiness Program provides a wide range of opportunities for students to explore and learn about opportunities for the future.

Student Achievement in the Academic Program

The following outlines the performance of similar schools utilizing the Connections Academy model. The proposed charter school’s curriculum, learning model, and academic program will enable the charter school to meet rigorous performance expectations.

Connections Academy Students Outperform Other Online School Students

Student cohorts in Connections Academy (CA) schools statistically outperformed (by 7.9 percentage points) cohorts in other online schools (matched on prior achievement) in terms of the percentage scoring proficient in reading on state assessments. The results of the study were validated by SRI and have been subjected to assurance by Price Waterhouse Coopers. The achievement of the CA students was compared to the achievement of students attending brick-and-mortar schools and other online schools, and cohorts were matched in terms of prior achievement. The research team collected school and district state achievement data (defined as the percentage of students scoring proficient or above on state tests) from 19 state departments of education for students in 3rd – 8th grades. States were included if they had a CA school that had operated for three or more years. The results provide evidence that CA students receive the same quality of education as that offered at their local public school and those students are better positioned for success in CA schools than they are at other online schools.

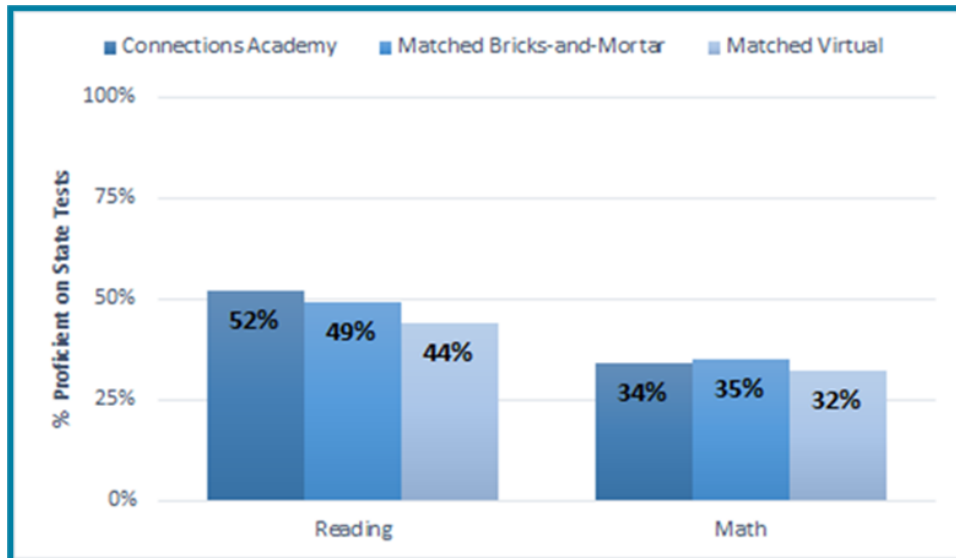


Figure 2. Connections Academy students outperform other online school students.

Using pre-pandemic data (state assessments from 2017-18 and 2018-19 in ELA and Math), a total of 65 comparisons of proficiency rates were made between CA schools located in 13 states and other virtual schools in those states. In 83.9% of those comparisons, CA schools either exceeded or were equivalent to the proficiency rate of the comparison schools. During the 2022-23 school year, CA schools served a diverse student population including 45% FARM eligible, 46% minority, and 24% in special populations.

Connections Academy Schools Are Improving Graduation Rates

Although the Board is proposing an incremental grade level expansion and 12th grade students will not be served until 2026-27, it is clear that Pearson-supported schools have consistently had a higher graduation rate than other statewide virtual schools. The 4-year Adjusted Graduation Cohort Rate for all CA schools with a graduating class, weighted by size of school, has increased for the past five years. During this time, CA schools have made significant progress in closing the gap to the average state

graduation rate across all those states. CA schools have increased their graduation rate by 20.9 percentage points, while the states have only increased by 6.4 percentage points. In addition, when comparing 2021 graduation rates (the last year with data published for all schools), when comparing the graduation rate of 30 CA schools to a comparison school in that state, 73% of the time the CA school's graduation rate either exceeded or was equivalent to the comparison school. In 2022, with data available for 25 schools, CA schools exceeded or were equivalent in graduation rate 80% of the time.

CA Students Achieve Higher Scores on Nationally Administered Benchmark Assessments

Students in Connections Academy schools often on average achieve higher scores than the national average on nationally administered benchmark assessments, as shown in the figure that follows. The vertical bar graphs show the percentile achievement of Connections Academy schools to the national norming data for the associated benchmark assessments. A percentile achievement of 50 represents the national average. The benchmark assessments are the NWEA MAP assessment and the Renaissance Star 360.

The NWEA MAP assessment is computer adaptive, measures student performance, and tracks student growth over time. MAP provides in-depth reporting and aggregates data by class and school/district. Individual reporting tracks student growth and identifies students' areas of strength and weakness. MAP also identifies students who demonstrate poor growth.⁴ NWEA assessments have been taken by over 10.2 million students.⁵

Renaissance Star 360 is a comprehensive pre-K–12 assessment suite that enables greater student growth as teachers lead students toward mastery of state-specific learning standards for reading, math, and early literacy. The computer-adaptive assessments identify areas of strength and need in the student's learning profile and measure student growth during the school year to help formulate learning goals and monitor student progress.⁶ These assessments align with state standards as well as the curriculum and are given to students in the fall, winter, and spring. Nationally, more than 34,000 schools and districts in all 50 states use Star assessments.⁷

⁴ Source: <https://www.nwea.org/the-map-suite/>

⁵ Source: https://www.nwea.org/resource-center/fact-sheet/29446/map-growth_NWEA_factsheet.pdf/

⁶ Source: https://www.renaissance.com/products/assessment/star-360/?int_content=int_web

⁷ Source: <https://www.renaissance.com/state-approvals/>

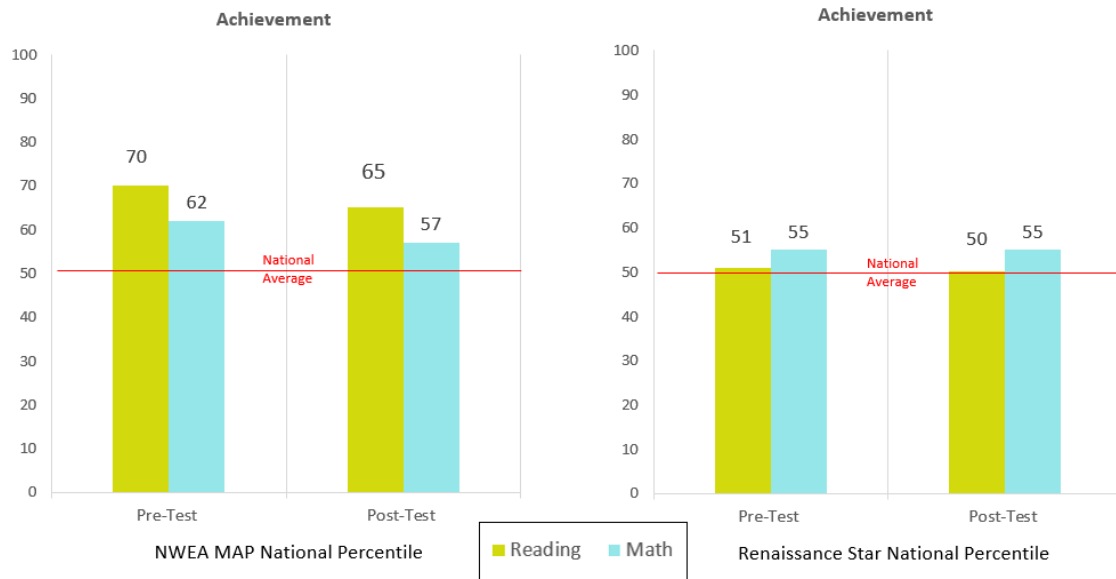


Figure 3. Students at Connections Academy Schools Have Higher Achievement Scores on Benchmark Assessments than the National Average.

Research Basis for the Academic Program

High-quality Teaching: Teachers will be equipped with skills and technology to maximize student learning. Research, focusing on online learning, echoes the critical importance of teacher quality and preparation. In November 2015, Mary F. Rice, Theron (Bill) East and Daryl F. Mellard published a study (Teacher Preparation and Promising Practices in Online Learning⁸) which analyzed effective teacher preparation and practice for the online learning environment.

In the study, "...administrators indicated teacher preparation and ongoing support (e.g., coaching and professional development) was very critical. In fact, they agreed this topic was one of the most critical of all topics covered in the forum. Administrators considered teacher preparation and support very important because they believed that teachers are the most important component of successful online learning."

MTCA teachers will have access to an award-winning Professional Learning model.⁹ Through this model, teachers will gain an understanding of their role as facilitator, distinguish changes to the online environment and its impact on student learning, and adapt to those changes while transitioning to their role as an online instructor at MTCA. Throughout each level of professional learning, teachers will engage in reflection opportunities and share their reflections with colleagues and school leaders. According to Rick DuFour and Douglas Reeves in their article, "Professional Learning Communities Still Work (If Done Right)" (October 2015),¹⁰ educators "...prefer professional development that helps them

⁸ http://centeronlinelearning.org/wp-content/uploads/Superintendent_Topic_7_Summary_November2015.pdf

⁹ In April 2015, the Pearson Professional Development Model was recognized with a silver award for Best Practices for Distance Learning Programming by the United States Distance Learning Association (USDLA). In May 2016 Pearson was recognized as a Codie Award finalist for Best Professional Learning Solution for K-20 Faculty and Administrative Staff.

¹⁰ <http://www.edweek.org/tm/articles/2015/10/02/professional-learning-communities-still-work-if-done.html>

plan and improve their instruction, is teacher-driven, includes hands-on strategies relevant to their classrooms, is sustained over time, and recognizes that teachers are professionals with valuable insights." Teachers are most satisfied when they are part of a learning community focusing on lesson planning, using data to personalize instruction, designing engaging content, and ensuring that all curriculum is aligned to state and national standards.

Timely and Actionable Feedback: The unique ability of an online school teacher to communicate one-on-one with students and offer timely and actionable feedback is key to student success in a virtual learning environment. As noted in the December 2020 article, *Providing Quality Feedback in Virtual Learning Environments*, "By providing effective feedback, you will have a powerful method for keeping students on track to meeting their personal, professional, and academic goals."¹¹ Professional learning topics will delve deeply into ways that teachers can reach students individually at MTCA, so that they are receiving timely and actionable feedback.

Personalized Instruction: Students clearly benefit from customized instruction that is personalized in terms of pace, content, sequence, and style. In a study published in 2016,¹² students in a developmental math class experienced between a 13% and 27% increase in course completion using personalized learning in a digital platform. A 2022 Canadian study conducted over the course of the pandemic found that students benefited from the more personalized experience they had while learning from home virtually; the learning environment was less overwhelming, so the focus increased on academics.¹³ Online learning gave some children autonomy, and a break from the business of curriculum for children to work independently on projects.

Data-Driven Instruction: Research on data-driven decision-making states: "...educators should consult and factor in multiple sources and types of student data to get a more complete view of student progress or achievement."¹⁴ Training and professional development will guide teachers through this process and continuously seek ways to ensure teachers are comfortable with the importance of using data to personalize instruction. At MTCA, teachers will be provided tools and clear guidance on how to analyze and use student performance data to provide targeted instruction, intervention, lesson modifications, custom assessments, remediation, and enrichment.

Parent Involvement: As part of its ongoing work to rethink the high school experience, the XQ Institute shared in a November 2020 post that there is substantial evidence that shows a strong correlation between parental involvement and academic achievement. From that same research, the data showed

¹¹ Shaw, A. (2020, December 17). *Providing quality feedback in virtual learning environments*. Wiley Education Services. <https://edservices.wiley.com/quality-feedback-in-virtual-learning/>

¹² "Using personalized learning, a developmental math professor increases her course passing rate". Website blog. Pearson Education Blog. Pearson Education, 2016.

¹³ Burke, Anne. (2022, August 1). How some children prospered in pandemic online learning. PhysOrg. <https://phys.org/news/2022-08-children-prospered-pandemic-online.html>

¹⁴ Mertler, Craig A. *Introduction to Data-Driven Educational Decision Making* (2014), http://www.ascd.org/publications/books/sf114082/chapters/Introduction_to_Data-Driven_Educational_Decision_Making.aspx

¹⁵ Ibid.

that parental involvement improves graduation rates and college enrollment.¹⁶ There are multiple ways for parents to be involved in education. In the online learning model, parents often act as the Learning Coach and are therefore directly involved in their child's education. A Stanford study points out one avenue of parent involvement and its impact. The study found that using parents as tutors brought significant and immediate changes in student's I.Q. scores. Another study showed that parental involvement increased students' motivation to learn including school engagement, goal achievement, and even motivation to read. The school will provide multiple resources for parents including Learning Coach central and host parent meetings to support parents as learning coaches. In addition to MTCA's intentional focus on personalized instruction, data-driven results, and parent satisfaction, the Board firmly believes its proven online model will serve a critical need in Montana for families desiring or needing a full-time, public online school option. MTCA will provide students with the capacity to be productive, global citizens who are armed with real life skills they can take with them beyond the classroom. The MTCA Board is confident it will deliver a high-quality learning experience for all students needing this proven model.

4.b Plans to Formally Assess Student Achievement Annually

MTCA will adhere to state-established accountability measures, administer state assessments, and follow proficiency measures defined by Montana rule and law. In addition, MCA will use well-established benchmark/progress monitoring assessments as well as its own internal assessment tools. The School's various assessments will combine with top-quality curriculum and instruction to improve student achievement and maintain a high level of accountability. MTCA will use assessments that are aligned with the curriculum, performance goals, and state standards. Benchmark assessments, internal assessments, curriculum-based assessments, and other assessments will be a key component of identifying students' academic deficiencies. Teachers will then utilize the data to support, address, and encourage student growth and ongoing achievement.

Such assessment tools may include resources that accompany the text used in a course (i.e., checks for knowledge, unit tests, and topic test banks) and any assessments delivered via software. All assessment tools go through a multi-step evaluation prior to approval for course use. Tools are first evaluated by an Assessment Design team to determine their quality and appropriateness in regard to the following criteria: alignment with course content and standards; age appropriateness; reading ability; cognitive rigor (questions are measured against Bloom's Taxonomy and Webb's Depth of Knowledge); best practices for item creation (e.g., clarity, relevance, and plausibility of item and distractors); accessibility; and compatibility with the EMS assessment engine (ease of implementation).

MTCA's assessment efforts will begin with a thorough placement process and progress review, including information gleaned from the initial administration of the Renaissance STAR assessments. The School will also utilize ongoing online and offline assessments to measure student progress in the curriculum to review student progress over the school year. Teachers will be encouraged to use curriculum-based assessments as well as teacher-created custom assessments as needed throughout the school year to gauge student progress.

MTCA will use the following tools to evaluate the performance and progress of students:

Benchmark/Progress Monitoring Assessments: MTCA will utilize Acadience Reading for grades K-2 Reading, Renaissance STAR for K-2 Math, and Renaissance STAR for grades 9+ for Reading and Math

¹⁶ XQ, T. (2020, November 24). *The relationship between parental and family involvement and student success*. Rethink Together. <https://xqsuperschool.org/rethinktogether/relationship-between-parental-and-family-involvement-and-academic-achievement>.

(students in grades 3-8 will be tested using MAST three times per year). Acadience Reading assessments assess core early literacy skills and help teachers identify children at risk for reading difficulties and determine the skills to target for instructional support.¹⁷ STAR assessments align with state standards and will be given to students in the fall, winter, and spring. STAR Assessments are computer-adaptive tests, meaning each student's testing experience is unique. When a student answers a question correctly, STAR automatically selects a more difficult item to be the next question. When a student answers a question incorrectly, the opposite occurs, and the next item is less difficult than the current one. The system understands how skills relate to one another—and that a student correctly answering advanced items doesn't need to be tested separately on the basic component skills. By adapting to students and eliminating unnecessary questions, STAR can accurately measure student performance and growth with fewer items and less time. Complete results are immediately available for educators via interactive, easy-to-read reports.¹⁸ The School will re-evaluate the specific benchmark assessments it will use based on any changes to Montana testing requirements.

Ongoing Informal Assessments: Students will engage in formative assessments that tap into all levels of student learning such as scored daily assignments, daily checks for understanding that require students to apply and integrate new skills in a thoughtful manner, and regular online quizzes and tests to measure understanding of newly presented material.

Unit Assessments and Offline and Online Portfolio Assignments: Throughout each logical unit of study, students will be required to complete a series of offline and online assessments. Offline assessments may include written compositions, science lab reports, short-answer questions, essays, book responses, and a variety of work samples. These assessments require direct teacher evaluation. Online assessments include quick checks, quizzes, online practices, and unit tests. While the quick checks and quizzes may be brief and frequent, the more comprehensive unit tests occur at the end of an entire unit. Many online assessments provide students and families with immediate objective feedback while offline assessments provide valuable reflection, feedback, and expertise from credentialed teachers. Student progress reports and grades include a combination of online and offline assessments.

Curriculum-Based Assessments: MTCA will use curriculum-based assessments (CBAs) as a quick and effective way to gather additional information on students' understanding of concepts. Teachers conduct CBAs, via telephone conversation or through one-on-one LiveLesson sessions, as a quick and effective way to gather information on students' understanding of concepts. CBAs are used to validate a student's understanding of concepts against the collected formative data within the EMS and identify areas where they may need additional support or practice. CBAs also assist teachers in verifying that students are doing their own work, pinpoint strengths and weaknesses in student mastery of concepts, and verify that student learning is on track.

Baseline Achievement Data: Whenever possible, standardized test results will be integrated into an incoming student's basic information in the EMS. Likewise, results for the mandated state assessments that students take while enrolled at the School, which are proctored face-to-face at a physical location (or as required by state law), are included in the EMS along with internal pre-, mid-, and post-test data. This data will be used to track student progress from year to year and within the year and to inform course placement and instructional needs.

State-Mandated Assessments: MTCA will be dedicated to meeting and exceeding all of Montana's grade level requirements. Students will participate in the SBA and/or MAST for ELA and Math in grades 3-8;

¹⁷ <https://acadiencelarning.org/acadience-reading/k-grade6/>

¹⁸ <https://www.renaissance.com/products/star-assessments/explore/>

MSA for Science in grades 5 and 8; the ACT with writing for grade 11 (Math, English, Writing, Reading, and Science); the MSAA and AMSA as appropriate; and all other assessments depending upon grade level, or course enrollment, as required by law. The School will set up in-person, proctored locations throughout the state (or as required by state law), based on the geographic locations of the student population. While the teaching/learning center area may be enlisted as a testing site, most testing will occur at other locations. Testing sites may include locations such as hotel conference rooms, public library meeting rooms, local schools if available, private tutoring and learning centers, and local colleges. Test sites will be easy for families to find, safe, secure, and will provide free parking.

Geographic population maps will be created to identify areas where testing sites are needed based on student population. Sites will be reviewed annually to adjust for an increase in student population. Students will be assigned to a testing center. If a family has transportation issues and is not able to make it to a testing site, the School will work with the family to make accommodations and may help with travel.

State Testing/Benchmarking

As a public school, students will participate in required state testing, including summative assessments such as the SBA and/or MAST for ELA and Math in grades 3-8; MSA for Science in grades 5 and 8; the ACT with writing for grade 11(Math, English, Writing, Reading, and Science); and the MSAA and AMSA as appropriate.

As outlined above, the School will use both the State's required summative assessments as well as formative benchmark assessments to measure student proficiency in reading and math and to obtain a scaled score that can be used to measure academic growth.

A State Test Plan will be developed each school year by the School. The Test Plan will address the tests, testing schedule, testing sites, student registration, test security, site security, and Special Education accommodations. The State Test Plan will also include a strategy to create an awareness and communication campaign for families, track student registration, participation, and make-up testing, all to help ensure that the 95% Accountability Rate testing requirement is met. The school will be provided support and resources from Pearson to support statewide testing such as a National State Testing Best Practices Manual to help facilitate the testing process.

In the first three years of operation, the School Leader will work with a designated teacher to manage the School's testing program. A full-time testing coordinator will be hired in the fourth year of operation. All staff members who serve as test proctors will be trained on Montana specific rules and requirements for testing. Training will be conducted synchronously with staff members at least two to three weeks before testing commences. Each staff member will acknowledge that they have been trained and understand the importance of maintaining test security. Tests and related materials will be kept secure at the School site or an approved designated location. Paper and pencil tests, when transported to students throughout the state, will be moved in locked cases (such as a locked suitcase or other device). A State Testing Team will support the School with online testing requirements and opportunities. Staff members will be trained on test security throughout the testing. Results of these annual assessments will be reported by the State as well as communicated directly to parents when required by state law.

Annual Assessment Calendar

The table below provides a plan that identifies the measures that may be used to indicate that students are making academic progress, the grade levels at which the assessments will be used, and frequency of assessing. This includes assessments through the curriculum and current State-mandated assessments.

Figure 4. MTCA will use multiple methods for measuring student development throughout each school year.

Grade Level	Measures Used to Indicate Progress	Frequency of Assessing
K-2 for Math	Renaissance STAR 360	Fall, Winter, Spring
K-2 for Reading	Acadience (formerly known as DIBELS)	Fall, Winter, Spring
9+ for Reading & Math	Renaissance STAR 360	Fall, Winter, Spring
3-8 R/LA and Math	MAST or SBA*	Spring
5 and 8 Science	MSA	Spring
Alternatively Assessed Students	MSAA and AMSA	Spring
11	ACT with writing	Spring

* The School will administer whichever assessment is the required state assessment.

Information from these assessments will be provided to teachers during the school year as an indicator of the possible risk of a student who may be struggling academically.

In the case of Renaissance STAR 360 assessments, an analysis was conducted on the relationship between fall and winter assessment scores on these assessments and state test proficiency across multiple states. They identified particular score values that are associated with an elevated likelihood of the student failing a state assessment in the spring. Scores that fall within the two lower interquartile ranges of normative scores within the fall and winter will be highlighted for teachers as indicating a student may be at-risk. These values will be highlighted separately for teachers for math and reading. Data from student scores from Acadience Reading assessments will also be analyzed. Acadience Reading assessments assess core early literacy skills and help teachers identify children at risk for reading difficulties and determine the skills to target for instructional support.

As state assessment scores become available, students who have a score on that assessment from the prior year that does not meet established state standards for their grade level and tested subject will also be highlighted to teachers as indicating a student may be at-risk and in need of intervention.

School Goals

Virtual schools serve the unique needs of a highly mobile student population. In 2021-2022, 39% of high school students had already attended 4 or more schools, 45% of middle school students had attended 3 or more schools, and 39% of elementary students had attended 2 or more schools. The negative impact of mobility on student performance has been well documented.¹⁹ However, state test performance of students at Pearson-supported schools has been found to be equivalent to their brick-and-mortar

¹⁹ Source: <http://www.edweek.org/tm/articles/2015/10/02/professional-learning-communities-still-work-if-done.html>

counterparts after adjusting for mobility.²⁰

For this reason, MTCA will implement the Good School Model (GSM), a research-based operating model to drive optimal learning outcomes. GSM is constructed on the knowledge that student connections are key to engagement, which in turn results in improved course performance and eventually stronger state accountability metrics. The model is continuously evolving, as MTCA and 28 other participating schools continue to receive real time data. GSM is designed to adjust quickly based on improved student outcomes.

The GSM serves as the organizational framework for identifying the levers and structural supports that schools need to deliver high quality and individualized learning via the differentiated value proposition. For example, if the model reveals a teacher practice that is likely to facilitate a positive student-teacher relationship, that information is not only provided to all participating schools so they can implement the practice, but the tools and the services are then quickly developed to enable teachers to enact that practice more effectively and efficiently.

The GSM includes practices that have been tested empirically and shown to be effective at improving learner outcomes. Practices are explored through the continuous mining of new and existing learner data and by partnering with individual teachers and schools to set up empirical impact studies.

Schools that have implemented the Pearson model with fidelity have shown significant academic achievement. For the most recently reported results (2021-22), Arizona earned a B, Florida earned a C, Iowa earned “Acceptable” for both Middle and High School, Nevada earned a rating of 4 stars (an equivalent of a B), Texas earned a C, Utah earned a C for both K-8 and High School, and Wisconsin earned a rate of “Meets Expectations.” The Board is committed to implementing this program with fidelity and looks forward to being an example of excellence for future full-time online schools in Montana. With this understanding in mind, the Board has developed the following aspirational academic goals to measure progress:

1. **Academic Proficiency:** Proficiency rates on the required state assessments will be 80% of the state average. The calculation is a ratio of the weighted school’s result to the weighted state average for all tested subject-grade level. A value of 100% indicates the School is equivalent to the state average.
2. **Academic Growth:** Each year, the School will show an increase in the state test ratio calculated in the previous goal compared to the previous year with the long-term goal of meeting or exceeding the state average. This goal begins in year 2.
3. **Parent Satisfaction:** MTCA will have an average of 85% positive responses on the questions directly impacted by the School in the Annual Parent Satisfaction Survey in year 1 and will increase to 90% by year 5.
4. **Student Retention:** The School will have a 75% DSU (during school year) retention rate based on the June 30 Monthly School Report (MSR) for the first year and will increase to 80% by year 5.

²⁰ Source: Gatti, G. (2018). A comparison study of Pearson-supported full-time schools to matched brick and mortar and virtual schools, examining the types of students who attend K–12 virtual school and the effects on performance of a highly mobile student body. Efficacy & Research Report. London: Pearson.

5. Describe any variances to existing standards that the public charter school requires to enhance educational opportunities.

5. Variances to Existing Standards

MTCA will be a fully virtual online school that uses a guaranteed, viable curriculum delivered asynchronously to students with synchronous support through teacher-directed LiveLesson sessions. This unique model allows teachers to work with students in an environment very different from a traditional school building. The proposed partner has over 21 years of experience in implementing this model successfully in other states, but the Board would need variances from the existing standards that are not required or appropriate in a fully online school, outlined in the table that follows.

Variance Request	Citation	Notes
Class Size/Teacher Load	10.55.711, 10.55.712, 10.55.713, 10.55.1301	Unlike a traditional brick and mortar classroom, teachers work with students synchronously via LiveLesson sessions individually and in small groups. Small class sizes are not as essential when the disruption of multiple students in one physical location at one time is removed. In a virtual setting, teachers can manage more students one at a time.
Library/Media Program	10.55.709, 10.55.1801	There are many library and media resources provided to students in the School and built into the lessons. Since the School is fully online there is not a physical library or librarian. Library and media resources include Scholastic Go! and EBSCO which provides access to thousands of academic journals, magazines, newspapers, encyclopedias and other reference works, and ebooks that include literary classics, graphic novels, novels, biographies, and high-interest fiction and nonfiction works. Park City Schools does have a physical library that students would also be able to use.
Curriculum Coordinator	10.55.704 (4)	Pearson provides the School with curriculum that is aligned to Montana Content Standards and the National Standards for Quality Online Teaching and Learning. The curriculum is accompanied by a combination of scopes and sequences, correlation documents, companion sites, teacher’s editions, and synchronous and asynchronous instructional training and resources. Pearson also provides a dedicated Instructional Partner who will work closely with MTCA to leverage evidence-based practices and connect curriculum to achieve school goals and learner outcomes.
Disaster Drills	10.55.721 (1b)	While there will be an office for administrators, teachers and students will mostly complete their school days at home. The School will develop a disaster plan for issues that might occur in the office or when students and teachers are together at field trips or state testing, but disaster drills will not be necessary since students are not in the building. Disaster drills could take place at the School office, but there will only be 3-4 people housed in that office typically.

Teacher Certification	10.55.907 (3)	The core teachers will be Montana certified, and the School will do its best to have elective teachers certified as well. An advantage of online learning is that the School can offer programs that have a low enrollment like Chinese, ASL, AP courses, or CTE courses through our partner Pearson. Pearson provides teachers certified in the subject area, but not necessarily certified in Montana. This waiver will open opportunities for MTCA students to take courses that are not available elsewhere in the state.
Arts Program Standards	10.55.1201	MTCA will provide arts education. In grades K-8 children take Art class and are provided with physical art materials to use at home that may include art sets (with pencils, paint, markers, drawing paper, erasers, oil pastels, and construction paper). Students in elementary and middle school can also choose art electives such as music. In high school, there are many arts choices that the School can choose to offer including: art history, animation, art in world cultures, digital design, digital media, digital photography, exploring music, game design and Introduction to drawing. As an online school, MTCA will not be able to offer performing arts (band, choir) since students will be located all over the state. This is also why MTCA will be unable to offer drama, play production and dance. The arts are very important to a well-rounded student, so field trips will be offered to see productions offered in the local community and students are encouraged to pursue these interests outside of the classroom given the flexibility of an online school.

6. Describe the instructional design, including the type of learning environment, class size and structure, curriculum overview, and teaching methods.

6.a Instructional Design

Utilizing Innovation and Flexibility to Meet Rigorous Performance Expectations

The program provides an asynchronous model that uses synchronous support. In synchronous learning, students and teachers work together at the same time in the same virtual place (e.g., LiveLesson rooms). Typical synchronous instruction involves teacher-facilitated lessons, group projects, and class discussions. In asynchronous learning, students work at their own pace and place, completing coursework within defined time limits. Students and instructors are not necessarily interacting in real time during asynchronous learning.

Schoolwork that students perform on their own time typically includes:

- Viewing pre-recorded online classroom sessions at home;
- Reviewing course materials online or offline;
- Completing assignments; and
- Collaborating with other students via secure message boards.



Figure 5. LiveLesson sessions allow teachers to work synchronously and directly with students.

Some students thrive with one-on-one attention while others crave the space to work through problems independently at their own pace. Offering a combination of the two learning approaches allows online schools to create a more personalized learning experience that supports different learning styles.

There are many benefits to asynchronous learning. Through asynchronous instruction and materials, students are provided the flexibility to:

- Learn at their own pace, place, and peak times, unconstrained by others' schedules;
- Work at their own level, moving as quickly or slowly through course materials as needed;
- Review difficult materials as often as needed; and
- Explore resources that may be unavailable in the traditional classroom.

There are also several benefits to synchronous learning, which supports the asynchronous learning. Interactivity is the key to synchronous instruction, allowing students to:

- Demonstrate their knowledge and practice their communication skills;
- Ask questions to deepen their understanding; and
- Build relationships with their teacher and fellow classmates.

And allowing teachers to:

- Engage students in discussions, problem solving, and group projects;
- Focus class time on bridging skills gaps; and
- Build one-on-one relationships with students.

Teachers can record class discussions and instructional sessions, making them available as asynchronous resources to reinforce learning or accommodate student scheduling conflicts. Together, these two approaches provide teachers and students the best of real-time and any-time learning.

A Technology-Enabled Vibrant Design

The proposed program for MTCA is a complete K-12 educational program that offers its students all the elements of a traditional brick-and-mortar school but uses proven, cutting-edge technologies and

applications that create a wrap-around online education environment and enable students to learn virtually. This includes computer-assisted learning systems, online classrooms, online laboratories, electronic mail, virtual tutoring, online help desk, group chat sessions, and non-computer-based activities.

Computer-Assisted Learning Systems

The school will use an Education Management System (EMS) called Pearson Online Classroom, which is both a Learning Management System (LMS) and Content Delivery System (CDS), Student Information System (SIS), and communication system. The EMS is the platform for organizing and supporting the entire educational environment for the School. This suite of web-based software delivers assignments and tracks activities (whether conducted virtually or offline) while monitoring the completion of individual lessons as well as mastery of skills and knowledge, all under the watchful eye of administrators, teachers, and Learning Coaches. The EMS operates within a secure, robust technology infrastructure protecting data from loss and intrusion while maintaining a safe environment. Students, teachers, administrators, and Learning Coaches access the EMS to organize, document, and interact, ensuring an unprecedented level of engagement. The EMS is continually updated and improved upon for the success of schools and families. All new releases and updates of the EMS are automatically provided.

Students and parents can access the EMS online 24 hours per day using a username and password. Email is securely located within the EMS. Students, parents, and teachers may only use it to communicate with each other, protecting them from spam, contact from strangers, and other mainstream email issues.

The EMS integrates key functions and services that are critical to maximizing the academic experience and performance of enrolled students for both the education program and school operations. MTCA will have personalized access to the EMS through the creation of a branded registration page, login page, and EMS menu bar. The EMS allows teachers, students and parents to:

- View daily, weekly, and monthly schedules at a glance;
- Access all lessons and course assignments;
- Monitor progress through an up-to-the-minute Grade Book;
- Receive alerts and communicate through secure email messages;
- Communicate with teachers and other students and families via message boards; and
- Provide ratings and written feedback about specific lessons and overall learning experiences.
- Access library materials such as EBSCO and Scholastic Go!

The EMS allows parents, counselors, teachers, Learning Coaches, and students to work together in a safe and supportive environment.

Hi, Dwight Demo | [Give us your feedback](#) | [Help](#) | [Account settings](#) ▾

Planner Virtual Library

Today **Fri, October 6** My Courses Links Announcements

Welcome!

To Do List

- Start by completing your [overdue lessons](#).*
- Talk to your Learning Coach about marking lesson(s) pending approval.*
- Complete the [Returning Student Questionnaire](#).

** This information is updated nightly.*

Events *the time below reflects EST

Time*	Schedule	Schedule Type
All Day	Family Cruise	Personal
All Day	Fall Break	Other

Lessons *Course Progress is updated nightly

Status	Lesson Name	Assessment(s)	Course Progress*
<input type="checkbox"/>	Algebra 2 A Small Wins Testing No Real Solutions	Practice Quick Check	<div style="width: 20%;"></div>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Algebra 2 A Transfer Test 1 Algebra 2 A Course Overview	Quick Check	<div style="width: 10%;"></div>

My Teachers

HOMEROOM

Jen Teacher
 555-234-1275
 LiveLesson

COURSES

Algebra 2 A Small Wins T... [6 more](#)

Jen Teacher
 555-234-1275
 LiveLesson

Language Arts 2 A: LCS

Antonio Teacher
 555-867-5309
 LiveLesson

School Counseling

Anita Counselor
 LiveLesson

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[PPRA Notice](#)
[System Requirements](#)

Contact Us
Are you having any trouble with the system?
Call or email a Support Representative. We can help!
 support@connexus.com 1-800-382-6010

Figure 6. The student homepage provides at-a-glance links to teachers, lessons, tech support, and more.

Virtual Classrooms

In addition to asynchronous learning through the online classroom, MTCA students will also have the opportunity to join online classrooms through a real-time, interactive web conferencing tool called LiveLesson®. LiveLesson sessions allow teachers to work synchronously and directly with students using

video, voice-over IP, electronic whiteboard, breakout rooms, and shared web surfing. These sessions are also recorded so students can watch on their own schedule. This live support is a direct reflection of formative assessment that indicates to the teacher where additional efforts are needed to help students master the content. Teachers document all synchronous contact with a student within the student's Log in the EMS.

Virtual Laboratories

To enhance the learning of the students, MTCA's science courses will offer a variety of lab experiences, including the following:

- Hands-on labs
- Virtual lab simulations
- Collaborative labs
- Video demonstration labs

The online school program stimulates creativity in students by offering an environment that allows learning to transcend beyond the walls of a traditional brick-and-mortar school. In high school science courses and certain middle school courses, students use PHet interactives,²¹ which are interactive simulations in physics, chemistry, math, earth science, and biology. These provide an intuitive, game-like environment where students learn through exploration and discovery. For example, chemistry students can build a nucleus or molecule, and experiment with gases and diffusion. Students also use a virtual rocks and minerals kit developed with Johns Hopkins University, a chemical reactions program, and virtual dissections. The virtual rocks and minerals kit offers a hands-on forensics style of learning, enabling students to perform experiments on rocks and minerals in a high-tech, interactive online learning environment. In math, proprietary interactive web tools for instruction include a virtual pan balance, a 2-D and 3-D shape program, geoboards, spring scales, digital scales, and work pads. Teachers will use the EMS to carefully monitor each student's progress through the curriculum and to individualize the program to maximize each student's performance.

Electronic Mail

An internal email communication system is securely located within the EMS. Students, parents, and teachers may only use it to communicate with each other, protecting them from spam, contact from strangers, and other mainstream email issues. Email accounts are created for each individual internally and are password protected. The delivery system's administrative roles and permissions tools protect email accounts and data from unauthorized access. Students will only be able to communicate with other students, teachers, or administrators through the system, and only administrators within the system can edit user accounts and reset passwords. Any communication between staff, student, and parents will be logged and secure. Teachers will be required to log all direct contact with students (phone calls, email correspondence, and LiveLesson, attendance) in student logs that are maintained within the secure platform. The system captures granular data about student and teacher progress and communication. For example, school leadership will be able to see the communication log of each teacher's communication with students.

²¹ See <https://phet.colorado.edu/>

The EMS facilitates the School’s self-assessment and continuous improvement in support of helping to empower students to meet their unique educational and life goals through flexible pacing, career and college preparatory programming, and practical career skill development.

The EMS will store all needed data about students, their attendance, and their performance. This data will be accessible via password-protected login for viewing by appropriate school staff, teachers, and parents/guardians on a moment-by-moment, day-by-day basis. Parents (and Learning Coaches if the Learning Coach is not a parent), teachers, and students will have access to an electronic Grade Book that tracks all results and serves as the basis of changes in the student’s learning plan. The Grade Book is located with the secure EMS so that student progress data is secure.

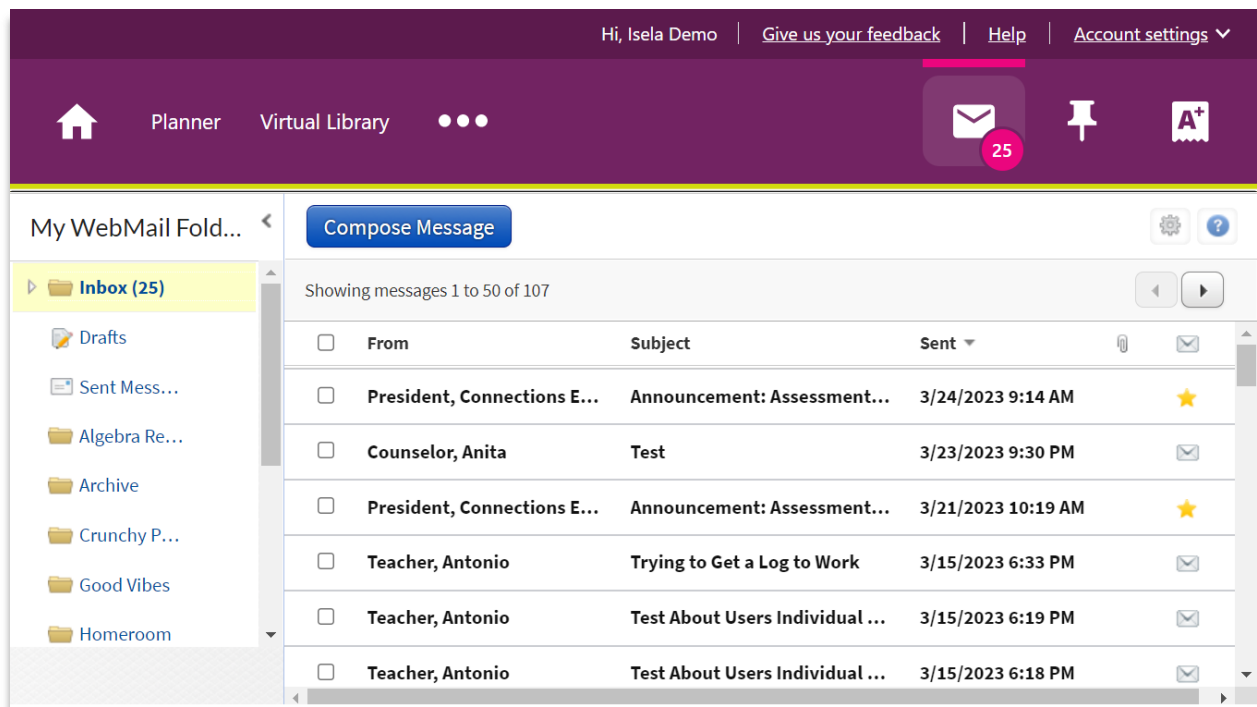


Figure 7. Students, Staff, and Parent/Guardians will have access to private, secure WebMail within the EMS.

Virtual Tutoring

Teachers provide LiveLesson sessions, office hours, small-group interventions, and one-on-one tutoring sessions throughout the week using LiveLesson®, a real-time, interactive web-conferencing tool. The Teacher Homepage enables teachers to easily identify students who may need additional instruction or intervention.

Online Help Desk

Students, parents, and staff will have access to extensive application and technical support through on-line Help (in the EMS) and live phone support via Pearson-provided Support Services to families and staff. Procedures for contacting the Support Services team are shared during the onboarding process and are posted for families and staff in the EMS.

In addition, numerous online resources will be provided for parents, students, and staff. The extensive Online Help system is searchable and easy to use. It contains a wide array of how-to topics about:

- Using features of the EMS
- Troubleshooting problems with a student's computer
- Using the software on a student's computer

An online detailed training will also be available that is interactive and engaging. It covers topics such as:

- Helping students be successful in an online school
- Staying organized
- Curriculum differences across grade levels
- Using the EMS

Group Chat Sessions

Through LiveLesson®, classmates will have the opportunity to share ideas, compare experiences, and have fun learning together. Group chat sessions are one of the features of the LiveLesson application. In addition, high school courses incorporate graded asynchronous online discussions which are required for all students. These discussions create opportunities for collaboration and interaction among students, increase problem solving skills, and provide opportunities for a “real-world” audience. Threaded discussions on course-based message boards are also used as appropriate by grade level to provide opportunities for collaboration and interaction among students.

Non-Computer-Based Activities

Throughout each logical unit of study, students will be required to complete a series of offline and online assessments. Offline assessments and activities may include written compositions, science lab reports, short-answer questions, essays, book responses, and a variety of work samples. These assessments require direct teacher evaluation. Online assessments include quick checks, quizzes, online practices, and unit tests. While the quick checks and quizzes may be brief and frequent, the more comprehensive unit tests occur at the end of an entire unit. Many online assessments provide students and families with immediate objective feedback while offline and non-computer-based activities and assessments provide valuable reflection, feedback, and expertise from credentialed teachers. Student progress reports and grades include a combination of online and offline assessments.

Given the balance of modes and media for learning at MTCA, actual time spent working online for students will vary according to each student's developmental level, learning needs, and learning styles. Students in grades K-2 typically spend 15-30% of their school day online; students in grades 3-5 typically spend 40-50% of their school day online; students in grades 6-8 typically spend about 50-75% of their school day online; and students in grades 9-12 typically spend 75+% or more of time online.

Since the majority of the work is done offline for students in grades K-5, including reading books and writing, students will have a flexible schedule. For students in grades K-5, between 15-30% of the school day will be centered on interactive online courses.

Students in grades 6-8 will be provided with a prescribed schedule, although students may work with teachers as needed to create more accommodating schedules. About 50-75% of the school day will be centered on interactive online courses.

When students move into grades 9-12, they will maintain their prescribed schedule. Again, students may work with teachers to create modified schedules. About 75+% of the school day will be centered on interactive online courses.

6.b Type of Learning Environment

MTCA is committed to providing a safe, positive, productive, and nurturing learning environment for all its students, and encourages the promotion of positive interpersonal relations among members of the School community.

Harassment, intimidation, bullying, cyber-bullying, and/or hazing toward any member of the School community, whether by or toward any student, staff, Learning Coach, Caretaker is strictly prohibited and will not be tolerated regardless of whether the target of the prohibited behavior are members of a legally protected group, such as sex, sexual orientation, race, color, national origin, marital status, religion, or disability. This prohibition includes aggressive behavior; physical, verbal, and psychological abuse; and violence within a dating relationship.

School policies regarding prohibited behaviors are documented in the School Handbook. A Montana-specific school handbook will be developed upon approval of the charter and will be reviewed and approved by the Park City Schools Board. This policy applies to all online school-related activities, such as participation in LiveLesson sessions, clubs, activities, email messages, discussions, and message boards. The School Handbook states that every student is encouraged, and every staff member is required, to report any situation believed to be prohibited behavior directed toward a student and/or staff member. All reports are investigated with appropriate disciplinary consequences as laid out in the School Handbook. The School Handbook contains the Terms of Use policy, which states expectations for using the EMS. See Appendix E: School Handbook for more details.

MTCA will provide a safe and supportive environment by keeping students safe from online predators and solicitors through the use of filtering software. The School is committed to following and implementing health and safety requirements applicable to online schools. MTCA requires the following courses focused on safety:

- Internet Safety - An Internet Safety Course is provided to students, Learning Coaches and parents. The i-SAFE course provides information about the various threats, challenges, and safety protocols needed to work and learn in an online environment. It contains valuable information about practicing safe behaviors online. This course is required training for all school staff. In addition, all computer technology issued to MTCA students will contain filtering software.
- Student Safety: The concern about the emotional and physical well-being of students is essential, not only for legal and ethical reasons, but also for academic reasons. It is imperative that school staff recognize the signs of child abuse and follow preventative measures to ensure student safety. As part of this course, school staff will complete required coursework on the identification and intervention of child abuse, mandatory reporting of child abuse, and child sexual abuse prevention.
- Suicide Prevention: MTCA will take the potential threat of suicide by students seriously. While suicide rates among teens is at the highest level it has been since World War II, this can affect students from all age ranges. It is imperative that school staff recognize the signs that could lead to attempted suicide and follow preventative measures to ensure student safety. As part of this course, school staff will complete required coursework on the awareness, prevention, and postvention of youth suicide.

Operationally, MTCA staff will follow outlined protocols for reaching disengaged students while considering student safety. Internal processes of teachers creating “Child Welfare,” “Child Concern,” “Student Escalation,” and “Truancy” Issue Aware (a project management system) tickets allow the appropriate groups of staff and administrators to respond to the varying concerns a student presents.

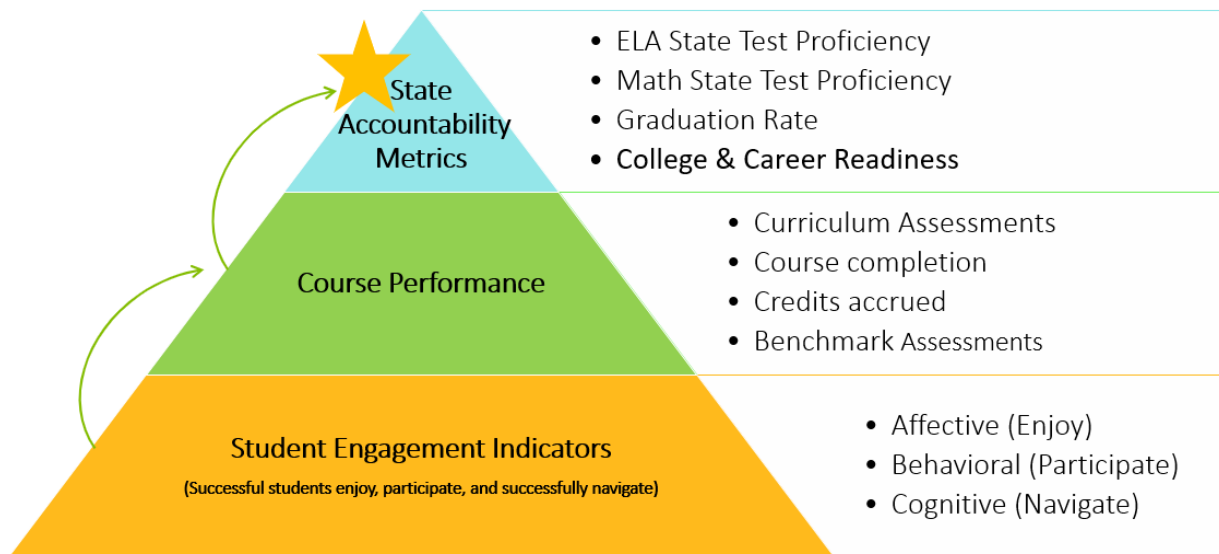
MTCA will work to develop partner relationships with local community police departments and school resource officers to ask that, if a student cannot be reached, these local authorities are contacted to conduct physical welfare checks on students.

All school staff must complete the trainings upon hire and complete refresher courses in accordance with state/federal laws. School staff and administrators have immediate access to trainings and guides through the EMS to stay familiar with procedures and to use as a reference. Completion of trainings is tracked to ensure all staff members have completed them in a timely manner.

School Counselors and other support staff offer continued guidance and resources on safety protocols for staff, students, and families throughout the school year. School staff members are asked to involve additional parties as appropriate to address concerns and to always keep student safety and well-being at the center of the conversation.

6.c Healthy Learning Environment & Positive School Climate

Building student connections and ensuring students’ comfort with navigating online learning are vital to student success. For example, past experience shows that students who feel connected to teachers and students by October are twice as likely to stay enrolled and perform 4-8% higher in their courses.



For this reason, MTCA will be laser-focused on supporting students and families at the foundation level of the student success pyramid to set them up for a successful school year. MTCA will utilize tools, services, and data that increase socialization opportunities and maximize teacher effectiveness in a way that enables them to focus on relationship building and personalized instruction.

Dedicated teams at MTCA and Pearson will use a variety of evidence-based practices to support students and families. A sample of these evidence-based practices are included in the following paragraphs.

- Student connections and a healthy school culture begin with outreach to students and families prior to the start of the school year by dedicated Engagement Specialists on the Enrollment team. This welcome team contacts families to speak with them about the School, answers questions they may have, and helps guide them through the next steps. Research from the Good Schools Model shows that the earlier the student and family are contacted, the higher the likelihood that the student will stay enrolled and have a sense of connectedness to the School.
- Students will have an opportunity to complete a brief “About Me” form at enrollment that will allow them to share interests and learning preferences with school staff prior to the start of the year. Research reveals that 100% of teachers say that this information enables them to better personalize the learning experience, and students that complete “About Me” are significantly more likely to feel a sense of belonging and connectedness to their school.
- Teachers can direct students to Global Clubs and Activities as a way to link student interests with similar-minded students. Research shows that students that participate in clubs and activities are significantly more likely to report a sense of belonging at their school and to stay enrolled.
- Teachers and school staff will connect with students and families via early welcome calls to acclimate the whole family to their new school’s culture and to provide an opportunity to get to know one another. During this welcome call, teachers will talk to the student and parent or guardian and prepare them for the first day of school and also reference the information the student provided in the About Me form to ensure the student feels known. Research shows that this early connection with a teacher is related to increased feelings of connectedness to their school, retention, and even higher course performance. Students who feel comfortable with their teachers are more likely to ask them for help when stuck.
- An annual student orientation course will be offered for all students enrolled in the School and their Caretakers to complete together. Research shows that students are more successful when parents and students complete these orientations.
- MTCA will have a dedicated Enrollment Team Support person that can speak to families, answer questions, and help guide them through the enrollment process. The team can track students who may be at risk of withdrawal using a research-based retention dashboard that, along with other important student information, enable the teams to intervene with the student with appropriate supports.
- To ensure that contacts and onboarding have been successful, students will complete a brief check-in at the three-week mark. Results will alert teachers, counselors, and other school staff about students who may need additional support with connecting to teachers and peers and navigating the learning environment. MTCA leaders will work with their Academic Success Partners to track welcome calls as well as student responses to the check-in. Teachers will receive an interactive digital resource outlining evidence-based practices and providing resources to set students up for success.
- For teachers needing some additional support or simply new ideas for providing a healthy school environment, Professional Learning Facilitators assigned to support teacher development can provide training such as the Quality Contacts series. The program helps to ensure that even the newest teachers feel confident and equipped to welcome and connect with students and families.

6.d Class Size & Structure

An online school like MTCA has the opportunity to reexamine class size and teacher-student ratios due to the delivery method. For example, class size and ratios were designed specifically for a traditional classroom that had goals related to both academics and classroom management. Classroom management looks very different in a virtual school, and teachers are freed up from those duties such as lunchroom duty, bathroom breaks, bell schedules, and playground duty. This removal of the traditional classroom management duties allows for an innovative approach to class sizes and ratios.

MTCA requests a class size waiver as part of the approval of this charter application. As a virtual program, MTCA also has additional flexibility when it comes to student-to-teacher ratios that traditional programs do not have, allowing the School to meet academic student outcomes in a model unique to an online setting. Besides the flexibility of not determining class size and ratios based upon classroom management, online schools can be strategic about making assignments due to complexity and overall effort. For example, each course is assigned an overall level of effort score. This sophisticated analysis permits assignment of lower class loads to teachers of more intensive-effort courses, such as higher mathematics and AP®. Courses with less intensive teaching demands, such as physical education or sign language, may have higher class loads without sacrificing quality of instruction. This analysis helps the target population be successful in core areas and improves pupil achievement. In addition, this helps teachers focus their attention on building strong relationships with their students and their Caretakers, which supports the individualization and differentiation of the approved curriculum. This in turn supports high academic achievement and thus higher graduation rates for the target population, especially for students in Montana who have been historically underserved by traditional educational approaches, lower graduation rates, and less post-secondary opportunities.

Importantly, teacher-driven instruction and differentiation works for each student; tools, services, and data can maximize teacher effectiveness; and engagement with families and Learning Coaches makes a huge difference. For example, the ability to differentiate instruction through the Lesson Introduction Page has demonstrated improved math scores, especially for students who struggle in math. Families choose online education for this increased interaction between students and teachers. Each year a parent satisfaction survey is administered to families in Connections Academy schools. Ninety-two percent of families are satisfied with the helpfulness of their child's Connections Academy teacher²², which demonstrates the needs of the targeted population and educational choice.

The goal of MTCA is to provide high-quality learning opportunities and interaction between students and teachers. MTCA teachers will have the ability to spend more time in direct instructional activities and interaction with students as the online classroom is designed to create more opportunities for this type of interaction. For example, teachers are provided with all of their lesson plans and assessments, rather than having to create them. This allows them to personalize the lessons and modify assessments for each student. This personalization is especially important with under-served populations. Time spent on grading is streamlined because all multiple-choice and other objective questions are auto graded; short answer, essay, show your work, and project work are all personally teacher graded. Yet even these

²² <https://plc.pearson.com/en-GB/insights/five-star-school-experience-connections-academy-parents-give-top-marks#:~:text=The%202021%20Connections%20Academy%20Parent,%22%20or%20%22B%22%20grade.>

take less time because rubrics and other guidelines are provided to support the teacher. MTCA teachers will have a number of productivity tools at their disposal, such as daily automated reports of each student’s progress in multiple areas, including attendance, assessment completion, and grades. This would not be possible without the lesson structure and the technology tools that are unique to the program. The focus of the teachers is on student success and individualizing to meet their learning needs. Data driven instruction is a key component allowing teachers to target interventions and support for those students most in need and improve their academic achievement.

Finally, to further improve pupil achievement, a counselor or advisory teacher is assigned to every 6th- to 12th-grade student. Counselors/advisors work to increase student success in courses through the implementation of advisor/counselor processes and protocols with an emphasis on quality communications, effective use of data, and accurate documentation of efforts. Additionally, advisors/counselors aim to improve the student and family’s overall online education experience and success in courses through collaboration and coordination of efforts with teacher managers, teachers, and other internal stakeholders. Counselors/advisory teachers will:

- Monitor student participation and performance;
- Help students navigate the EMS and other technology; and
- Facilitate communication between the student and the subject matter teacher(s) as needed.

The table below shows the staffing chart and is based on the assumption of a 13.4% Special Education population.

Staff	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
12 Month					
School Leader	1	1	1	1	1
Assistant Principal	0	1	1	1	2
Manager of Counseling	1	1	1	1	1
Manager of Special Education	1	1	1	1	1
Administrative Assistant	1	2	3	3	4
10 Month					
Elementary Teachers (K-5)	4	7	9	11	12
Secondary Teachers (6-12)	7	14	20	23	26
Counselors/Advisory Teachers	1	2	3	3	3
Special Population Teachers	3	5	7	8	8
ESL Lead Teacher	.5	.5	.5	.5	.5
Testing Coordinator	0	0	0	1	1
Staff Totals	19.5	34.5	46.5	53.5	59.5
Student Totals	505	960	1280	1485	1630

6.e Curriculum Overview

MTCA will use the award-winning, high-quality, web-based curriculum and instructional program from Pearson that meets standards at the state and national levels while also integrating the industry-leading materials, texts, and resources available. The curriculum is aligned to the Montana Academic Standards

and will be updated to meet any subsequent standards. The curriculum supports the School’s mission to empower Montana students to thrive in today’s ever-changing world through learning the way that’s best for their individual needs in a flexible environment.

The Board believes the School will benefit from the best practices developed from implementing a proven core model of online learning over the past 21 years. Not only is the Pearson program accredited by Cognia, formerly AdvancED, but Pearson was named a Tech & Learning Winner: 2021 Best Remote & Blended Learning Tools for Primary (K-6) and Secondary (6-12). Tech & Learning judges deemed Pearson supported schools as a standout for helping students, parents, and teachers succeed in new learning environments.

The curriculum is updated regularly, based on a rigorous analysis of student performance on state standards as measured by state testing results and internal assessments. As state standards are modified or changed in the future, Pearson will continue to modify or update the curriculum to meet them. The curriculum provides instruction throughout the lessons in both synchronous and asynchronous sessions. Teachers provide LiveLesson sessions, office hours, small-group interventions, and one-on-one tutoring sessions throughout the week.

Elementary and Middle School Curriculum (Grades K-8)

Students in grades K-5 will be enrolled as elementary school students, and students in grades 6-8 will be enrolled as middle school students. The program of instruction for students in grades K-8 can be individualized, personalized, and delivered in a non-traditional environment to give students the best pathways to success. Montana-certified teachers will deliver a personalized elementary school and middle school curriculum that will be tailored to best meet the needs of their students.

Below is an overall description of the curriculum. However, the exact courses offered at the School will vary each year (with the anticipation of expanding offerings) and depend on the number of students enrolled, the grade levels of enrolled students, the number of staff hired meeting educational, operational, and financial requirements and the priorities of the School.

Although students in a full-time online school have flexibility in their daily schedules, elementary and middle school students will take six to nine courses per year. The following lessons will be scheduled on a weekly basis for students in elementary grade levels, K-5. In addition to lessons, students will have the opportunity to participate in clubs, activities, and extracurricular experiences on a weekly basis.

Kindergarten-Grade 5:

- Language Arts, 5 lessons per week
- Mathematics, 5 lessons per week
- Social Studies, 3 to 4 lessons per week
- Science, 3 to 4 lessons per week
- Fine Arts, 1 to 2 lessons per week
- Education Technology, 1 lesson per week
- Physical Education & Health, 1 lesson per week, with daily physical activity
- Optional – electives such as Music, Sign Language, Mandarin Chinese, or Spanish

Grades 6-8:

- Language Arts, 5 lessons per week
- Mathematics, 5 lessons per week
- Social Studies, 3 to 5 lessons per week
- Science, 4 lessons per week
- Fine Arts, 1 to 2 lessons per week
- Education Technology, 1 lesson per week
- Physical Education & Health, 1 lesson per week, with activities for daily physical activity
- Optional – electives such as Music, Sign Language, and Spanish

The curriculum includes a variety of multimedia and interactive practices to reinforce standards for language arts and math at each grade level. LiveLesson sessions, which provide for real-time direct instruction with individual and small groups of students using Internet based phone service, chat, electronic whiteboard, breakout rooms, and shared web surfing, allow teachers and students to interact with one another in real time in the online classroom. In addition, LiveLesson sessions may be recorded and saved for students to revisit later if they missed them or want to refresh themselves on the topics covered.

World language instruction is available for students in grades 3-8. Advanced middle school students (typically grade 8) have the option to take high school level French, German, Spanish, and Sign Language. Language courses integrate proven-effective online materials with a unique audio recording tool that allows teachers to listen to and assess student speech and pronunciation. In addition to World Language courses, eligible middle school students may take high school courses in math, English language arts, social studies, science, and appropriate electives and will earn high school credit pending successful completion of the course.

MTCA will focus on developing and nurturing a culture of math acceptance and empowerment. With a focus on student engagement, activities and practices will provide opportunities for the individual to develop an awareness of and appreciation for math in the students' everyday lives; make math more approachable for students, parents, and teachers; build pride and confidence in math effort and achievements; and make math connections with college and career planning.

Music, a popular elective, is offered for different grade and experience levels and is aligned to the National Core Arts Standards as well as to Montana Content Standards. With audio, visual, and interactive technologies, this course provides a unique and advanced learning experience. Students will use critical listening skills to analyze music while participating in interactive experiences. This elective will expand the student's knowledge of the foundations of music.

The curriculum also offers a selection of accelerated classes in math, science, and language arts. With individualized lessons, special courses for accelerated learners, and specialized teachers, an environment is created where talents are nurtured, and potential is realized.

High School Curriculum (Grades 9-12)

MTCA will provide a balanced, challenging high school experience focused on students pursuing paths that lead to success, whether via college or an immediate career choice.

Delivered by Montana-certified teachers, the high school curriculum provides a comprehensive program with multiple levels of academic coursework aligned to Montana Content Standards that include Standard, Honors, and Advanced Placement® (AP).

While all levels are designed to meet standards and provide students with a rigorous curriculum, levels enable differentiation based on student needs and college and career goals. Students will work with an academic placement advisor or their school counselor, depending on grade level, to determine the appropriate course level placement that best meets the student's needs. Students entering 10th-12th grades are typically supported in course placement by the School counselor.

The proposed high school curriculum includes a wide variety of electives and intensive world language instruction. Courses will continue to be added as they become available.

The high school program will include both teacher- and student-directed instruction, with feedback and support through asynchronous and synchronous e-learning tools. The high school curriculum

incorporates a variety of best-in-class instructional materials, including digital versions of textbooks from major publishers, enhanced multimedia, interactive materials and resources, discussions, and/or communication/conferencing tools. In addition, students have offline assignments, projects, lab experiences, and practice work.

High school courses incorporate graded asynchronous online discussions which are required for all students. These discussions create opportunities for collaboration and interaction among students, increase problem solving skills, and provide opportunities for a “real-world” audience.

For academic and career planning, the high school model also includes a host of services and procedures to address credits, transcripts, and counseling. It is important for students to start early on planning for graduation and post-secondary education or the world of work. Without early planning, students run the risk of missing crucial courses that might thwart their plans or aspirations.

An Honors/AP program will also be available for high school students. The program has a history of success, as demonstrated by a national survey of families with students enrolled in honors or AP classes at schools supported by Pearson. In the 2022-23 survey conducted by Shapiro + Raj (an independent market research company), 95% of parents agreed the curriculum was high quality, and 97% of parents were satisfied with the Connections Academy program.²³

High school students will have access to college preparatory courses and may choose from Honors courses, College Board–approved online AP courses, and Dual Credit courses. By enrolling in these demanding college-level courses, students demonstrate their commitment to higher education, which may give them a competitive advantage during the college application process.

Curriculum Development Framework for Standards Alignment

In order to create quality curriculum, Pearson’s Curriculum Development team has developed a rigorous process for the creation and delivery of content. The average course has a six-year life cycle, and the following graphic shows the process of course creation and maintenance during this time period.

²³ Source: <https://www.connectionsacademy.com/program/student-stories/>

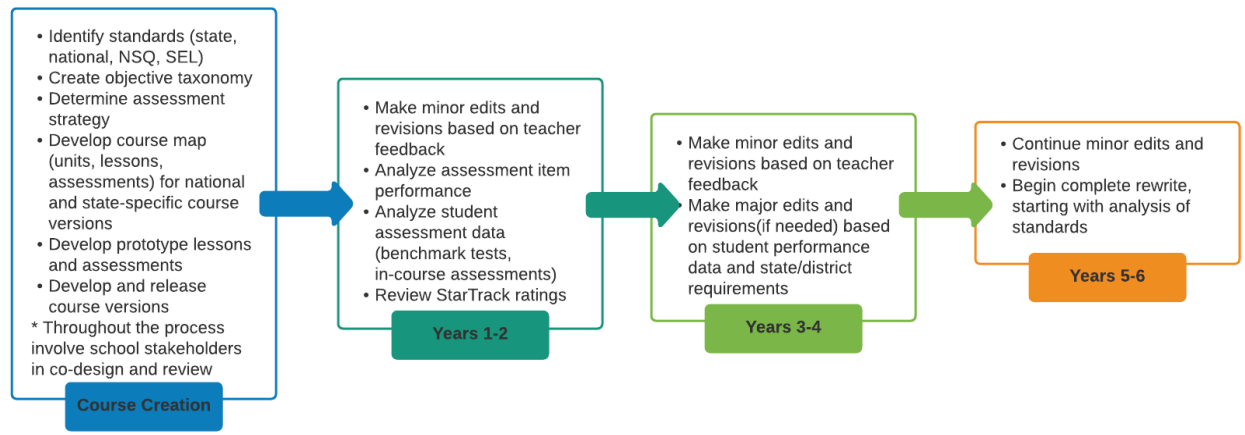


Figure 8. The curriculum follows a consistent cycle of standards alignment, development, and maintenance.

Objective Taxonomy and Standards Alignment: The Curriculum Frameworks team develops the objective taxonomy by doing an analysis of national and state standards, breaking them down into learning objectives, or discrete concepts and skills, and then looking at where those learning objectives align with each other, where they build on and support each other, and where they are distinct from each other. They then build lessons and assessments to fit those learning objectives.

Using Language Arts 6 as an example, the Curriculum Frameworks team looks at the most commonly found learning objectives and uses those to build out the scope and sequence and the course map for our base grade 6 Language Arts course. Then, they identify which learning objectives are needed for each state and use those to build out the state-specific scopes and sequences and course maps, removing those learning objectives that weren't necessary in order to accommodate those that will have the greatest impact on achievement for students in that state.

Scope and Sequence: During the analysis phase, the Curriculum Frameworks and Assessment Design teams create a purposefully structured and logically sequenced framework for the course. This framework is called the scope and sequence, which briefly outlines the standards, a suggested order for teaching content and skills, and a recommended number of lessons for each unit.

Course Map: A course map serves as the blueprint for a course and is heavily influenced by the objective taxonomy and scope and sequence. It provides an overview of the course content and helps in guiding the development of units and lessons in the course. Once the big picture is described, the unit maps provide additional information, including the specific content for each lesson. This may include the following elements:

- standard alignment to lesson objectives and assessments
- lesson content
- essential vocabulary or key words
- cross-curricular connections tapping into background knowledge and real-world applications
- activities that allow the student to practice, reinforce, and extend learning
- extensions and modifications to address different learning modalities
- online resources that engage the learner

- assessment maps
- course and lesson metadata (e.g., lesson days, gradebook weights)

The curriculum aligns to the National Standards for Quality Online Courses. These standards may be found at <https://www.nsqol.org/the-standards/quality-online-courses/>. Pearson’s fully aligned curriculum is designed to meet best practices in online learning. A variety of online methodologies are utilized to ensure successful delivery of the content and student success.

Implementation of Indian Education for All

In accordance with the Administrative Rules of Montana, Chapter 55, Standards of Accreditation,²⁴ MTCA will make it a priority to ensure that the School and the staff has the knowledge, skills and content to ensure Indian Education for All means cultural enrichment, academic engagement, and equitable pedagogy for all students. MTCA students will learn about the distinct heritage and contributions of Montana tribal groups and governments in a culturally responsible manner. The School will ensure that the history, contributions, and portrayals of American Indians are integrated across all content areas. Through study of other cultures, all students can come to recognize and appreciate the unique qualities of their own cultures; at the same time, each Montana student will become more self-aware and develop a reference point to support greater understanding of others.

Teachers will create LiveLesson sessions within their courses to incorporate the heritage of all Montanans into their lessons. An example could be a math lesson whose purpose is to teach a standard focused on geometric shapes. The teacher can connect some of these shapes to the patterns on tribal blankets and the shapes of Cree and Crow teepees. For younger students, the teacher can do a lesson on the four seasons and what this change means for daily life. This can be related to the migration of Plains Indians as they moved from summer camp to winter camp. The school will review and utilize lessons suitable for remote instruction on the state’s OPI website (<https://opi.mt.gov/Educators/Teaching-Learning/Indian-Education-for-All/Indian-Education-Classroom-Resources#10052411303-opi-remote-learning-lessons-and-units>).

Teachers have the ability to add custom lessons and assessments in the EMS to supplement the existing curriculum. This will enable Montanan culture to permeate the instruction.

In addition, field trips are an essential part of instruction at MTCA. Teachers will plan these trips around the state with an eye to exploring all parts of Montanan culture and ensure that history, contributions, and portrayals of American Indians are integrated across all content areas.

For older students, along with embedding the heritage of Montana tribal groups into the curriculum, MTCA will partner with Montana Digital Learning Academy to offer electives such as the Cree and Crow Languages, and Montana History.

6.f Teaching Methods

MTCA’s instructional model relies on the support of highly effective and appropriately certified teachers, supportive Learning Coaches, and a high quality, standards-aligned curriculum. Each student will have a staff of experts, including Montana-certified teachers, working together to leverage the School’s myriad of resources — technological, instructional, and interpersonal — for success. Learning Coaches are also

²⁴ See

https://opi.mt.gov/Portals/182/Page%20Files/Task%20Forces/Chapter%2055/Final%20Report_Chapter55_7.22_final%20_BPE.pdf?ver=2023-01-10-112826-723

encouraged to, and typically function as, an integral part of the student's learning team.

Appropriately Certified Teachers: Student learning benefits from committed educators and involved parents who provide total support. Each student will have one or more certified Montana teachers specially trained in teaching in an online environment, the online curriculum, and specific instructional methods.

In each of the elementary and middle school grade levels or high school core subjects, students will be taught by a highly effective and certified teacher with expertise in a particular grade level or content area, including career and college readiness focus. Teachers will work closely with each student on a one-on-one basis using innovative technology tools. The teacher will be responsible for teaching, evaluating assignments and work products, providing instructional assistance, assigning and scoring assessment activities, and providing feedback on the student's performance.

Based on a student's demonstrated mastery of the material, teachers will add, expand, or replace assignments; they will also grade students in each subject, and make promotion or retention decisions. Depending on the needs of the learner, teacher direct contact — via telephone, LiveLesson session, and email — with the student and Learning Coach may be as frequent as several times a day, and at minimum twice per week. Teachers view the student's attendance, participation, and performance on a daily basis via the EMS teacher's dashboard on their home page. Teachers will not wait to be contacted; they will be proactive participants in their students' learning plans. Teachers in online schools often comment that they understand their students better in the virtual environment than in a traditional classroom since they work with students one-on-one.

Supportive Learning Coaches: Each student has a Learning Coach (a parent, extended family member, or trusted adult designated by the parent/guardian) who is encouraged to work in person with the student. Typically, a Learning Coach helps keep students motivated and on track and regularly communicates with the students' Montana-certified teachers. At the high school level, the Learning Coach is less involved with daily instruction but is encouraged to continue serving as an important supervisory role for the student.

Key Instructional Methods: One key to the program of instruction is the online Dynamic Classroom instructional model, which is a flipped instructional model. Students complete their curriculum asynchronously. They experience the content via their courses' narrative slides, videos, screencasts, audio bits, images, and activities – various delivery methods to meet various student learning styles. Doing this prework allows the student to have a different quality learning experience with the teacher, often within a LiveLesson session, delivered either individually, in a small group, or in a whole group setting. Dynamic Classroom time is not dedicated to lectures, but instead deeper understanding, critical thinking, problem-solving, and discussion. This allows MTCA teachers to create active and collaborative learning experiences that can enhance the material presented in the asynchronous curriculum and engage learners in ways that meet their unique learning styles.

A second key to the program of instruction is the use of Universal Design for Learning (UDL)²⁵, an overarching framework that addresses the learning environment as a whole. This includes both the physical learning environment as well as the instruction. When the whole environment is addressed first, it removes physical, mental and psychological barriers so all students have full access to the instruction, regardless of their needs and abilities.

²⁵ Source: <http://www.udlcenter.org>

With UDL, MTCA teachers will utilize the following principles to guide their instruction:

- Principle I: Provide Multiple Means of Representation (the ‘what’ of learning). Learners differ in the ways that they perceive and comprehend information that is presented to them.
- Principle II: Provide Multiple Means of Action and Expression (the ‘how’ of learning). Learners differ in the ways that they can navigate a learning environment and express what they know.
- Principle III: Provide Multiple Means of Engagement (the ‘why’ of learning). Affect represents a crucial element to learning, and learners differ markedly in the ways in which they can be engaged or motivated to learn.

A third key to the program of instruction is the inclusion of 21st century skills, which also aligns to MTCA’s educational philosophy. These skills include but are not limited to critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity and represent an approach to instruction that prepares students for the quick-changing reality of the world after graduation. These skills are so important and are infused throughout both asynchronous and synchronous instructional opportunities at MTCA.

Also key to the Program of Instruction is the asynchronous model that uses synchronous support. These LiveLesson® sessions are real-time using an interactive web conferencing tool. LiveLesson sessions allow teachers to work directly with students using video, voice-over IP, chat, electronic whiteboard, break-out rooms, and shared web surfing. LiveLesson sessions are also recorded so students can watch or review at their convenience, providing students and families the flexibility they desire. Typical synchronous instruction involves teacher-facilitated lessons, group projects, and class discussions. In asynchronous learning, students work at their own pace and place, completing coursework within defined time limits. This allows students who need more time on a particularly challenging skill or concept to take that additional time, while moving more quickly through skills and standards that are already mastered, which cannot be done in a traditional classroom setting. Schoolwork that students perform on their own time typically includes viewing pre-recorded online classroom sessions at home; reviewing course materials online or offline; completing assignments; and collaborating with other students via secure message boards.

These teaching methods and instructional approaches allow MTCA to create a more personalized instructional experience that aligns to the online curriculum, assessments, and educational philosophy of the School.

6.g Plan for Identifying and Addressing Students’ Academic Deficiencies/Weaknesses to Encourage Student Growth and Achievement

Student data such as lesson completion, attendance and formative assessments will be used to identify students with academic deficiencies or weaknesses who may need additional intervention and remediation. Formative assessments are embedded throughout the curriculum and include quizzes, curriculum-based assessments (CBAs), portfolios, quick checks, and unit tests to assess skills and standards. Teachers will engage with students, individualizing instruction and interventions to ensure that each student’s learning needs are being met, which is a key component of the School’s educational philosophy.

MTCA will have a Student Support Team (SST) that utilizes the Multi-tiered System of Supports (MTSS) Framework, which ensures individual students receive the academic and behavioral support they need. Students who need support beyond the core curriculum with differentiation (Tier I) receive targeted intervention via the supplemental instructional programs in Tier II, and Tier III. Students’ responses to interventions are monitored, and adjustments to the type and intensity of support are made as needed. This MTSS process is facilitated by data from the EMS to help identify students’ instructional needs that

may require intervention. The process of identifying student intervention needs, assigning interventions, tracking their success, and communicating with parents, is ongoing. All efforts are made to meet each student's needs within the general education program.

In addition, intervention Indicators are displayed in the EMS to facilitate a teacher's identification of students who may need additional instruction or intervention in math, reading, or both. Teachers can also run performance reports through the EMS. This method accomplishes the following:

- Enhances the multitiered instruction model;
- Provides a multi-tiered system of support model;
- Provides access to and analysis of real-time data to determine mastery/proficiency;
- Incorporates data-driven decisions throughout instruction;
- Maximizes use of the instructional support programs, resources, and data;
- Identifies the need for tiered interventions for non-mastered/proficient skills and standards; and
- Identifies students' response to the implemented interventions.

As student performance data becomes available, analysis will be performed using current and prior data to identify trends for each performance indicator. Once performance trends are identified, they will be reviewed to determine if any trends are considered “challenges.” Trends and priority performance challenges will be captured. MTCA staff will analyze root causes and set performance targets, improvement strategies, and interim measures and benchmarks.

Teachers will use a variety of resources and strategies for instruction and behavior to enhance and extend learning through differentiated and personalized instruction. These instructional tools also allow teachers to fill in skill gaps and extend learning while providing additional evaluative data on student achievement. Differentiation involves thoughtful planning for the following: instructional design used to deliver content to students; lesson content used to support and extend concepts and skills; instructional practice used to provide targeted instruction and actively engage students; assessments used to evaluate student learning; insightful best-practice for engaging in an online classroom, and instructional and behavioral activities to meet the needs of individual and small groups of students. When Tier I differentiation strategies fail to produce adequate progress, Tier II intervention is considered.

Tier II instructional and behavioral support can use many of the same instructional strategies and/or research-based programs that were used for differentiation as part of Tier I; however, it is the increase in the frequency and intensity of use that defines the intervention as Tier II. Tier II intervention is explicit, systematic, and targeted to the greatest area of student learning needs. Supplemental programs provide teachers with reports for progress monitoring that can be uploaded to the EMS to ensure all student performance data is in one place. Tier II instructional support will be provided two to three times a week for 20–30 minutes per session. Teachers will use the student's log to document student performance and response to the instructional intervention every two weeks.

Tier III interventions are facilitated and monitored by the general education teacher who increases the occurrence of synchronous direct instruction using LiveLesson sessions as well as implements other instructional strategies and research-based programs that are explicit, systematic, and targeted to specific student learning needs. Students participating in the Tier III level of intervention will receive targeted instruction that is live and teacher driven for four to five days a week in order to focus more intensively on skill deficits and areas of concern. Through Tier III interventions, students may be assigned a personalized course of study that allows for increased learning time in their areas of academic or behavioral need. Teachers will use the student's log to document student performance and response to the intervention every week.

7. Describe plans for identifying and successfully serving students with disabilities, students who are English Language Learners, students who are academically challenged, and gifted students, including compliance with applicable laws and regulations.

7.a Plan for Identifying & Successfully Serving Students with Disabilities

Identifying Students with Disabilities

MTCA will be bound by Child Find requirements as well as the requirements of IDEA 2004, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). Child Find is the process of locating, evaluating, and identifying children (birth – 21 years) with disabilities who may need special education and related services. MTCA will follow federal and state law in identifying children who may need these services. If a parent shares a concern or makes any Child Find requests during the enrollment process, those concerns will be addressed immediately upon enrollment. If, after enrollment, MTCA is made aware of a child who may require additional supports, the School's special education staff will contact the parents of the child to discuss the next steps in the evaluation and identification process. This process is provided at no cost to the family.

To identify students entering or already enrolled without prior special education identification, the MTCA School Leader and general and special education staff will conduct Child Find exercises to identify, locate and evaluate students who need special education services by conducting regular reviews of teacher observations, implementing systematic screenings, analyzing assessment results, and data. Parents will also provide input and may initiate a Child Find request at any time while their students are enrolled at MTCA. Additionally, MTCA will engage in public awareness activities to ensure parents are informed about available special education services and how to request those services.

The Manager of Special Education or school designee will serve as the Child Find Coordinator and provide Child Find information to school staff, parents, and state and local organizations and agencies. These efforts will include compliance with the special education referral process, providing professional development to staff and support to the School's Student Support Team (SST), maintaining a deep understanding of and participation in the Multi-tiered System of Supports (MTSS) process, including universal screening procedures, creating and maintaining written policies and procedures related to Child Find, and involvement in public awareness activities related to Child Find.

Students may be referred for special education evaluation by their parents, teachers, or the SST. The SST, consisting of general education teachers, intervention specialists, and school administrators, will regularly review data from universal screeners to identify struggling students. Identified students will be referred to the SST. The SST will consult with the parents and address struggling students' needs through the MTSS process. With parental consent, the teacher will implement and document tiered interventions to address the student's greatest area(s) of need as well as and the response to interventions. The student's responses to MTSS efforts are used as one very important data metric in the determination of special education eligibility. Interventions will not be used to delay or deny a parent-requested special education evaluation.

Serving Students with Disabilities

MTCA will comply with all state and federal policies regarding enrollment of special education students, with support from Pearson. After submitting the initial application to the School, all families will be asked if their child has had an IEP within the last three years and if that IEP is currently active. The families can choose if they would like to disclose if the student has an IEP. A decision not to disclose the

student's IEP status will not delay the student's enrollment. The IEP is reviewed to determine the level of each student's need and to consider the types of services required.

MTCA will ensure that the School is providing students with equal access to the education program and instructional materials. Students with disabilities will receive access through the delivery of resources and accommodations tailored to each student's individual abilities and needs, including assistive technologies and individualized support. A continuum of placements will also be available to meet the needs of students with disabilities for special education and related services. Additionally, the continuum is aligned with state and federal guidelines. Consultative support will be provided to general education teachers to provide modifications and accommodations to the general education curriculum. The EMS provides teachers with immediate access to students' accommodations and modifications. On the teacher homepage and in the grade book, a yellow triangle appears next to each student requiring accommodations and modifications. When teachers hover over this yellow triangle, a pop-up window appears listing all accommodations and modifications. This triangle is available for students with IEPs, students with Section 504 plans, and English Learners (EL).

Special education instruction is provided in small group and one-on-one LiveLesson sessions. Services (when/where/how) are determined by the IEP team. The individualized focus of an online school, along with the small group or one-on-one learning environment, often has a positive impact on students' ability to participate in the general education environment. At least annually, and at each IEP team meeting, IEP teams will consider supplementary aids and services, accommodations, modifications, and Extended School Year (ESY) while ensuring the student is educated with nondisabled peers, to the maximum extent possible (LRE), and making expected gains on IEP goals. ESY services will be offered in accordance with federal and state special education regulations. Pearson support will be made available at any time MTCA needs guidance on specific questions related to delivery of special education services.

Assistive Technology (AT) will also be provided according to student needs and evaluation data as determined by the IEP team. Support may include collaboration with support staff, provision of speech-to-text, and text-to-speech. With support from Pearson, MTCA will facilitate the provision of text-to-speech and speech-to-text software, screen readers, magnification software, etc., for students with disabilities as outlined in the IEP. In addition, supports for hearing impaired students include closed captioning or American Sign Language during LiveLesson sessions.

MTCA will ensure the delivery of special education and related services. Schools supported by Pearson have demonstrated success with special populations nationally. Pearson will assist MTCA in providing these services and has extensive experience providing special education services to existing public online charter schools throughout the US. The School's Manager of Special Education will review the student's documentation (IEP and Evaluation Report), if available during the enrollment process, and recommend course placement in collaboration with the School Counselor.

After enrollment, MTCA staff and administrators will convene an IEP team meeting, which will include the student's parent(s) or guardian(s) and other appropriate IEP team participants, to adopt or amend the student's IEP as necessary, or create a new IEP. MTCA will provide special education and related services in conformity with the IEP, either by adopting the existing IEP or by developing a new IEP for the student in accordance with the requirements of IDEA. Qualified special education staff with appropriate licenses and training will work closely with general education teachers, paraprofessionals, and related service providers to ensure that every student receives accommodations, modifications, and all needed services to access and progress in the general education curriculum in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) according to their IEPs or to be provided research-based interventional curriculum if the student's IDEA disability(s) require the same.

7.b Plan for Identifying & Successfully Serving Students Who Are English Learners

MTCA will provide a program for every student whose first language is not English for the purpose of facilitating the student's achievement of English proficiency and academic standards.

As part of the language instruction educational program (LIEP), a certified ESL Teacher will implement the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP®) as the framework for language acquisition lesson designed for direct instruction to English Learners (ELs). The goal of the LIEP is to ensure that students whose native language is not English are able to develop and attain English proficiency and achieve academically. Teachers will participate in professional development sessions to increase their knowledge of practice and implementation of this instructional model. The SIOP® framework will ensure that teachers design lessons to make grade level content accessible for ELs while developing their academic language skills in content area classes. English Learners will be provided with additional supplementary instructional support software and progress monitoring throughout the school year. The school will also have access to a TESOL-certified EL expert who will support the MTCA and its efforts to identify and educate EL students in the virtual environment. There will be a teacher at MTCA who will be designated the ESL Lead and will work closely with the EL expert.

MTCA will designate one of the certified ESL teachers as the ESL Lead Teacher, who will work with content teachers, Learning Coaches, and students to ensure material is adapted and accessible for all ELs. The ESL Lead Teacher will maintain student files, consult with Learning Coaches, provide direct instruction to ELs via LiveLesson sessions and telephone calls, conduct progress monitoring throughout the school year, create and implement targeted interventions based on the data from progress monitoring, monitor exited ELs for academic progress using state-specific criteria, and comply with state and federal law pertaining to ELs. MTCA staff will have access to Pearson's EL experts who will support the School and its efforts to identify and educate English Learners.

Identifying English Learners

MTCA will follow state procedures and will use required criteria and procedures to identify ELs. Incoming families will complete the Montana Home Language Survey (HLS)²⁶ that includes questions such as those below and will be retained in the student's record.

- What language did your child learn when he/she first began to talk?
- What language does your child most frequently speak at home?
- What language is spoken by you and your family most of the time at home?
- Is there a tribal or heritage language spoken by you or your family within the past few generations? Yes No If yes, what language or languages?
- If available, in what language would you prefer to receive information from the school?

If the HLS indicates a response to any questions that a language other than English is used, the student will be considered as a potential English learner until the English proficiency assessment is completed. The Montana Home Language Survey must be completed within two weeks of a student's enrollment. Every student who answered "yes" to one of the HLS questions will also have

²⁶ See Appendix A at:

https://opi.mt.gov/Portals/182/Page%20Files/Statewide%20Testing/ELP%20Page/EL%20Guidance/APPENDIX%20A_MONTANA%20HOME%20LANGUAGE%20SURVEY.pdf

cumulative records reviewed to determine any prior EL instruction and services. Additionally, a family interview will be completed by MTCA.

In order to identify if a student qualifies as an EL, the School will use a screener: Kindergarten W-APT and WIDA Screener (Online or Paper) for grades 1-12 to assist in the identification of students who may be ELs. MTCA will notify parents/guardians of the initial screening results and program placement decisions within 30 days of the beginning of the school year or within two weeks if the student enrolls during the school year. If there is a delay in assessing the student, this will be documented in the student's file to include the reason for the delay, evidence that the student is accorded the programming required for ELs pending the delay, and a specific timetable for completing the assessment. This documentation will be mailed to the parents in the language they understand. A copy will be retained in the student's files. Additional information will be provided to the state as required, specifically in regard to entering and maintaining data for ELs in the Achievement in Montana Student Information System (AIM) database. MTCA will consider at least two of the following criteria in addition to the language assessment scores to develop a plan for each EL, often called the Individualized Language Plan (ILP):

- Extent and nature of prior educational or academic experience, social experience, and/or a student interview;
- Recommendations and observations by current and previous instructional and supportive services staff;
- Level of mastery of basic competencies or skills in English and native language according to local, state or national criterion-referenced standards;
- Grades from the current or previous years; or
- Other assessment results.

Any determinations by the EL Team (recommended participants are the ESL Lead Teacher, parent and general education teacher—preferably the Language Arts teacher) will be contained in a written evaluation with a narrative description of the basis for the decision and will be placed in the ILP. The ILP will be implemented to address the student's English language needs and will be maintained in the student's file.

Each student identified as EL will be further assessed in academic areas to aid the student's teachers in developing an appropriate instructional program. MTCA will take previous experiences into account in planning and providing appropriate instruction to such students. Students with an EL classification will be placed in the appropriate English Language Arts course and core subject area courses based on their assigned grade level.

Any teacher, administrator, parent, or parent's designee may request a review of the student's progress in attaining necessary subject area competencies or in overcoming persistent deficiencies in overall student performance. The ESL Lead will make initial recommendations for appropriate accommodations in the student's programming to address problems identified and will document such accommodations in the student's ILP. MTCA will also inform parents of the right to opt out of EL services in writing. Although parents may choose for their student not to participate in the language programs, MTCA will still be required to ensure that the students' language and academic needs are being met.

The school will have the ESL Lead explain to the parent, in a language parents understand:

- The range of language programs and services that the child could receive, the methodology MTCA plans to employ to address the student's educational needs and the qualifications of teachers and any others who would be employed in teaching the student;
- The benefits likely to be gained by being enrolled in an EL program and receiving services;
- MTCA will not require students to be assigned to programs specifically designated for ELs, or schools containing such programs, in order to receive EL services; and
- All students who qualify for but opt out of EL services must still participate in the annual EL assessment until they meet the state-required exit criteria.

Serving Students Who Are English Learners

Once identified as an EL, a student will receive support based on English proficiency via LiveLesson sessions by a certified EL teacher. Instruction will be aligned to standards grounded on scientific research for English acquisition in reading, writing, listening, and speaking.

MTCA will designate an ESL Lead Teacher, who will work with content teachers, Learning Coaches, and students to ensure material is adapted and accessible for all EL students. The ESL Lead Teacher will maintain student files, consult with Learning Coaches, provide direct instruction to EL students via LiveLesson sessions and telephone calls, conduct progress monitoring throughout the school year, create and implement targeted interventions based on the data from progress monitoring, monitor exited EL students for academic progress using state-specific criteria, and comply with state and federal law pertaining to EL students.

MTCA staff will have access to Pearson's EL experts who will support the School and its efforts to identify and educate EL students. All EL students will participate in the state's annual language proficiency assessment, ACCESS for ELs®. The English proficiency annual assessment takes place in spring. The ESL teacher will coordinate in-person testing of EL students at various locations across the state within the established timeframe for Montana, typically December through February. These annual test results will help determine continued program placement and allow teachers to adapt content to individual student needs. All mandated state tests will be administered to EL students as required by law.

For special population students (e.g., students with disabilities, students with section 504, or EL educational plans), accommodations help these students access the general education curriculum. Accessibility tools and accommodations should be used in instruction and assessment throughout the school year and at least three months before any state assessments. Supports that are provided on state assessments must be familiar to the student and must match those supports and accommodations that are provided for classroom instruction and assessments throughout the School. A student's parents/guardians should be knowledgeable about the supports and accommodations planned for their child so that they are aware of the conditions under which their child will participate in the assessment.

All students can work toward grade-level academic content standards via differentiation and appropriately selected supports and accommodations. In most cases, the EL supports that are provided to students in the classroom should be the same as those provided for statewide assessments. In some cases, a support that is allowable in the classroom is not appropriate for use on statewide assessments. Test administrators at MTCA who will work with EL assessment must

receive test administration, test security, and test accessibility training prior to administration of any state assessments to ensure accurate, valid, and reliable results of student achievement.

Communicating with English Learners' Families

MTCA will provide parent notifications both in English and in the parent's preferred language. MTCA will continue to notify parents/guardians of the assessment results annually and continued participation in or exit from the EL program.

Monitoring and Evaluating the Progress and Success of EL Students

When a student demonstrates proficiency, a school-based team consisting of the ESL Lead Teacher, student's content teachers, administrators, counselors, and the parent/guardian will decide whether the student continues to require EL instruction. Multiple factors are considered, including current ACCESS for ELs®, or other state-required annual assessment testing results, academic performance, state test results, teacher feedback, and parental input. MTCA will follow the state procedures for reclassifying EL students.

If the team determines that the student meets criteria for reclassification, is English proficient and can successfully perform in classes without significant language support, they will be reclassified as Formerly ELs (FELs) and moved to the monitoring stage. The school will actively monitor EL students for academic progress using state-specific criteria for two years after exiting the program. This will occur within 60 days of receiving the results reports from the ACCESS for ELs assessments.

MTCA will closely monitor the re-designated student's progress and establish procedures, methods, and services to be used to provide assistance to exited/former EL students who experience a lack of success due to academic deficits and/or lack of English proficiency. For example, for re-designated elementary grade students, the School's EL team pays particular attention to students flagged for Tier II and Tier III interventions. For re-designated students in middle school and high school, the EL team pays particular attention to the list of students who are in "escalation" status.

Providing Accommodations to ELs with Disabilities

Under IDEA, the determination of which MTCA students are English learners with disabilities and the type of accommodations they receive will be made by the student's IEP team or dictated by their 504 Plan. The development of this plan should include the student's parents/guardians, teachers, school counselors and others. Students identified may not be able to take one or more of the four domains (Reading, Writing, Listening, Speaking) on the ACCESS for ELs assessment due to their disabilities.

Program Placement for EL Students with Disabilities

Identified EL students at MTCA who have been dual identified as requiring special education services will have a specific program of instruction to address their English language development needs. While this is a separate and district service, English learner objectives will still be included in the student's IEP. The ESL Teacher will be included in the IEP team at MTCA to provide guidance in establishing EL goals, planning a program of instruction, and implementing that instruction when appropriate.

7.c Plan for Identifying & Successfully Serving Students Who Are Academically Challenged

Identifying Students Who Are Academically Challenged

As described previously, MTCA will be bound by Child Find requirements as well as the requirements of IDEA 2004, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). MTCA will follow federal and state law in identifying children who may need these services. If a parent shares a concern or makes any Child Find requests during the enrollment process, those concerns will be addressed immediately upon enrollment. If, after enrollment, MTCA is made aware of a child who may require additional supports, the School's special education staff will contact the parents of the child to discuss the next steps in the evaluation and identification process. This process is provided at no cost to the family.

To identify students entering or already enrolled without prior special education identification, the MTCA School Leader and general and special education staff will conduct Child Find exercises to identify, locate and evaluate students who need special education services by conducting regular reviews of teacher observations, implementing systematic screenings, analyzing assessment results, and data. Parents will also provide input and may initiate a Child Find request at any time while their students are enrolled at MTCA. Additionally, MTCA will engage in public awareness activities to ensure parents are informed about available special education services and how to request those services.

The Manager of Special Education or school designee will serve as the Child Find Coordinator and provide Child Find information to school staff, parents, and state and local organizations and agencies. These efforts will include compliance with the special education referral process, providing professional development to staff and support to the School's Student Support Team (SST), maintaining a deep understanding of and participation in the Multi-tiered System of Supports (MTSS) process, including universal screening procedures, creating and maintaining written policies and procedures related to Child Find, and involvement in public awareness activities related to Child Find.

Students may be referred for special education evaluation by their parents, teachers, or the SST. The SST, consisting of general education teachers, counselors/advisory teachers, and school administrators, will regularly review data from universal screeners to identify struggling students. Identified students will be referred to the SST. The SST will consult with the parents and address struggling students' needs through the MTSS process. With parental consent, the teacher will implement and document tiered interventions to address the student's greatest area(s) of need as well as and the response to interventions. The student's responses to MTSS efforts are used as one very important data metric in the determination of special education eligibility. Interventions will not be used to delay or deny a parent-requested special education evaluation.

In addition to the Child Find protocols and processes, there are other ways that MTCA staff will be able to identify students who are academically challenged. Intervention Indicators are displayed in the EMS to facilitate a teacher's identification of students who may need additional instruction or intervention in math, reading, or both. Additionally, teachers can run performance reports through the EMS. This method accomplishes the following:

- Enhances the multitiered instruction model;
- Identifies essential skills and standards by subject/grade level;
- Identifies how and where these essential skills and standards are assessed within the program;
- Provides an MTSS model;
- Provides access to and analysis of real-time data to determine mastery/proficiency;
- Incorporates data-driven decisions throughout instruction;

- Maximizes use of the instructional support programs, resources, and data;
- Identifies the need for tiered interventions for non-mastered/proficient skills and standards; and
- Identifies students' response to the implemented interventions.

In addition, enrolled students are always in one of four escalation statuses:

1. On-Track
2. Approaching Alarm
3. Alarm
4. Exempt (rare)

These statuses are displayed by student names on the teacher homepage for fast identification of students who may be struggling. Escalation status is based on several criteria, as outlined in the School Handbook: General Portion, and is a combination of measures that indicate if a student is demonstrating adequate participation and therefore attendance in the program. This not only includes the actual attendance, but also lesson and assignment completion rates, and the amount of student communication with the teacher. Therefore, if a student's work completion rates are not on track or if they fail to communicate on a regular basis with the teacher, they will be placed into an escalated (Approaching Alarm or Alarm) status. Teachers can then reach out to the family, schedule one-on-one LiveLesson sessions with the student, or provide supplemental support to help the identified student. The School will also work with the family and student to help get the student's attendance back on track if attendance is a factor in the Alarm status.

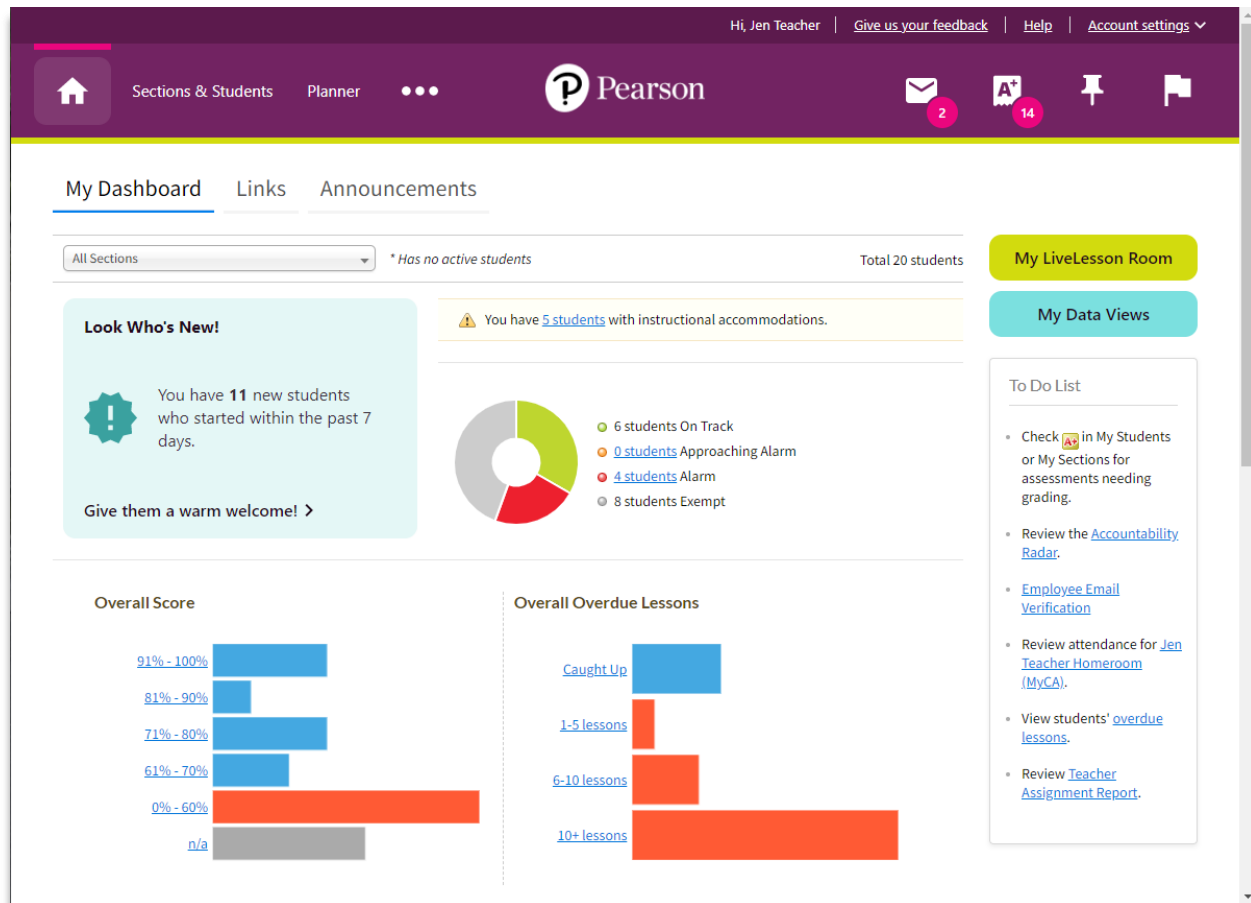


Figure 9. The Teacher Homepage enables teachers to easily identify students who may be struggling academically.

Serving Students Who Are Academically Challenged

MTCA will have a Student Support Team (SST) that utilizes a multi-tiered system of support including the Multi-tiered System of Supports (MTSS) framework, which ensures individual students receive the academic and behavioral support they need. Students who need support beyond the core curriculum with differentiation (Tier I) receive targeted intervention via the Supplemental Instructional Support Programs in Tier II, and Tier III. Students' responses to interventions are monitored, and adjustments to the type and intensity of support are made as needed. This MTSS process is facilitated by data from the EMS to help identify students' instructional needs that may require intervention. The process of identifying student intervention needs, assigning interventions, tracking their success, and communicating with parents, is ongoing. All efforts are made to meet each student's needs within the general education program.

The following paragraphs describe the School's plan to implement tiered instruction and intervention.

Tier I

Tier I is the first level of a multi-tiered approach to a system of instructional and behavioral supports. Tier I includes core reading and math curriculum aligned with the Montana Content Standards as well as state mandates on attendance and other behavioral engagement requirements. In addition to core

coursework and behavioral expectations, the core curriculum includes teachers' use of differentiated instruction that meets the needs of all students throughout the school year.

All students will have access to the core curriculum; work through their lessons; engage with interactive content such as videos, virtual labs, and manipulatives; engage with teachers and school staff; and demonstrate their understanding through formative assessments such as quizzes, curriculum-based assessments (CBAs), portfolios, quick checks, unit tests to assess skills and standards, and through daily behavioral practices of lesson completion and attendance.

Teachers will use a variety of resources and strategies for instruction and behavior to enhance and extend learning through differentiated and personalized instruction. These instructional tools also allow teachers to fill in skill gaps and extend learning while providing additional evaluative data on student achievement. Differentiation involves thoughtful planning for the following: instructional design used to deliver content to students; lesson content used to support and extend concepts and skills; instructional practice used to provide targeted instruction and actively engage students; assessments used to evaluate student learning; insightful best-practice for engaging in an online classroom, and instructional and behavioral activities to meet the needs of individual and small groups of students. When Tier I differentiation strategies fail to produce adequate progress, Tier II intervention is considered.

Tier II

Areas where students struggle at the Tier I level and require Tier II support may include phonological awareness, phonics, reading fluency, reading comprehension, math fluency, math computation and reasoning, writing, and behavior. Tier II begins after a general education teacher has attempted a variety of instructional and behavioral supports and differentiation strategies over a four- to six-week period and has documentation showing that the student is not yet responding successfully with strong performance in the identified area of weakness.

Tier II instructional and behavioral support can use many of the same instructional strategies and/or research-based programs that were used for differentiation as part of Tier I; however, it is the increase in the frequency and intensity of use that defines the intervention as Tier II. Tier II intervention is explicit, systematic, and targeted to the greatest area of student learning needs. Frequent and formal logged progress monitoring noting student performance in the EMS is a critical part of the implementation of this tier.

Teachers may elect to assign students a web-based Supplemental Instructional Support Program as part of Tier II intervention. These programs provide students with additional instruction and practice in the foundational skills needed to be successful with grade level work and expectations for engagement.

Supplemental programs provide teachers with reports for progress monitoring that can be uploaded to the EMS to ensure all student performance data is in one place. Tier II instructional support will be provided two to three times a week for 20–30 minutes per session. Teachers will use the student's log to document student performance and response to the instructional intervention every two weeks.

Tier III

Tier III includes the most intensive and frequent level of instructional and behavioral support and is the next step in the multi-tiered approach for students who have not been successful in the core curriculum that includes differentiation activities and Tier II supplemental interventions. Tier III interventions are facilitated and monitored by the general education teacher who increases the occurrence of synchronous direct instruction using LiveLesson sessions as well as implements other instructional strategies and research-based programs that are explicit, systematic, and targeted to specific student learning needs.

Students participating in the Tier III level of intervention will receive targeted instruction that is live and teacher driven for four to five days a week in order to focus more intensively on skill deficits and areas of concern. Through Tier III interventions, students may be assigned a personalized course of study that allows for increased learning time in their areas of academic or behavioral need. Teachers will use the student's log to document student performance and response to the intervention every week.

Supporting Student Engagement during Interventions

Learning Coaches, usually a parent, guardian, or responsible adult, have varying levels of skill and previous involvement in their child's education. MTCA will provide programs and resources to support Learning Coaches to ensure they are effective educational partners. Learning Coaches will be given access to a Learning Coach Orientation course that explains how the program works, demonstrates how to use EMS, and recommends best practices for supporting their students' learning. Further, all Learning Coaches will have access to Learning Coach Central, a website designed specifically for Learning Coaches. Learning Coach Central provides Learning Coaches with access to resources designed to help them navigate the EMS and support them in working with and motivating their students.

Students in grades K-5 will be assigned to a homeroom teacher, and students in grades 6-12 will be assigned an advisory teacher/counselor as soon as they are enrolled. (The homeroom teacher is a regular core teacher, and the advisory teacher is a counselor or secondary teacher.) This teacher will work closely with the students and the Learning Coaches to acclimate them to the online learning experience.

Experience has shown that appropriate placement is critical for student success in an online environment so that academic gaps can be addressed immediately. The first step will be the placement process, where students who need additional support are provided with the curriculum materials and teaching resources appropriate to their achievement level as a starting point for learning, with the goal of attaining at least one year's academic progress within the school year.

Teachers will ensure that all students receive the necessary level of support throughout the learning process. Beginning with identified essential skills and standards based on the Montana Content Standards, teachers easily see what students should know and be able to do by the end of a specific grade in each of the core area subjects.

Throughout the school year, synchronous webinars are offered several times a month to support Learning Coaches throughout the onboarding process as well as in working with their students. Sample webinar topics have included:

- Helping Your Student Become College and Career Ready
- Supporting Students with Learning Differences
- Embracing Struggle Through a Growth Mindset
- Nurturing Student Motivation and Engagement
- Socialization in Virtual School
- Supporting Your Student with Math
- Practices of Effective Learning Coaches
- Academic Honesty in Virtual Education

The School will provide Learning Coaches with the support and tools to ensure they are successful partners in their child's education and learning. If a Learning Coach or a student is not meeting expectations after the customary support is provided (e.g., attendance is not being recorded, the student is not doing his/her work, or is not being successful), then the teachers of the student will intervene and schedule a conference with the parent and Learning Coach (in instances where the

Learning Coach is different from the parent). Clear attendance parameters will be communicated to all stakeholders. Our goal is for all students to be successful in an online learning environment, and we will work with the families to find the option that best meets their unique family needs.

7.d Plan for Identifying & Successfully Serving Gifted Students

Gifted students that require accelerated and enrichment learning opportunities are a diverse subsection of the general student body and thereby require additional educational opportunities for the fulfillment of their exceptional potential. MTCA will offer a comprehensive education program, which recognizes students who require accelerated and enriched learning and their unique needs. MTCA will challenge the student, provide expanded learning opportunities, and support the student's affective needs.

Utilizing a multiple criteria approach, students will be identified through both quantitative and qualitative measures of performance.

The identification process can begin during the enrollment process. The parent has the option to indicate their interest in accelerated learning opportunities and provide supporting documentation. If documentation is provided during enrollment, the student is placed in classes accordingly. Screening for students once they are enrolled will involve a multi-level approach to identifying who exhibits exceptional performance or potential. Indicators such as parent recommendation, exceptional test scores, classroom performance, and teacher recommendations will be used to determine student course placement. At least one of the following will be used for screening:

- Recommendation by parent, Learning Coach, or teacher;
- Anecdotal notes that indicate exceptional performance or potential;
- Recommendation from the student's prior school;
- School and district administered assessments;
- Classroom performance and student portfolios;
- Nationally normed aptitude and achievement data;
- Benchmark tests; and
- Placement test results.

An essential part of the screening process will be nominations. These nominations will be completed at any point of the year, with predesignated testing and evaluation windows determining admittance and processing of nominations. Once submitted, the nomination will then be evaluated by a staff member who will collect evidence before then considering the student for formal evaluation.

At least three of the following are used for referral for formal evaluation:

- Completed nomination by either the parent and/or Learning Coach or teacher of the student,
- School and district administered assessments,
- Classroom performance and student portfolios that exhibit above grade-level performance,
- Nationally normed aptitude and achievement data,
- Placement test results, and/or
- Patterns of growth or upward trajectories over time based on formal and informal data.

Upon referral, students will undergo a formal evaluation process. MTCA placement committee will use both quantitative and qualitative evidence to determine whether accelerated coursework and enrichment activities are in the best interest of the student. Parents will be kept informed of all testing results and placements. The following criteria will also be used to justify access to additional programs:

- Nationally normed and validated achievement tests that demonstrate a year or more above grade level achievement for the normed age group;
- Observed or measured demonstration of rapid acquisition of new knowledge;
- Work portfolios that demonstrate achievement, performance, or expertise in one or more academic areas;
- Observed or measured demonstrations of exceptional leadership ability, creative thinking, foreign language aptitude, communication skills or technology expertise;
- Placement test results; and
- Completed nominations by either the parent or Learning Coach or teacher of the student.

Furthermore, in recognition of the importance of equal access to education programming, all formal evaluations will take into account possible confounding variables in the evaluation such as English as a second language, disabilities as defined in 34 CFR 300.8 (relating to child with a disability), gender or race bias, and/or socio/cultural factors that may influence performance. Using the principles of MTSS, students identified as gifted will be enrolled in curriculum that is attuned to the specific needs of the child. In grades 3-8, students will have the opportunity to enroll in Accelerated courses in math, science, and English Language Arts. These courses will allow students greater opportunities to interact with the teacher and other students, explore grade-level content, participate in extension projects, investigations, and activities that integrate skills and promote higher-level thinking, and to participate in individualized activities. Students will also be able to choose from a wide variety of electives and club activities to supplement learning in core subjects. MTCA will also offer an exclusive online version of Junior Great Books® where students will enjoy age-appropriate works and participate in online literary inquiry discussions with other high-ability students.

Identified gifted high school students will also have access to rigorous college preparatory curriculum and will be able to choose from dozens of Honors courses and many Advanced Placement® (AP) courses. Honors courses will offer advanced students opportunities to participate in extension projects, investigations, and activities that require integrated skills application and higher-level thinking. Furthermore, AP courses will allow students to engage in college-level investigation of subjects with the opportunity to earn college credit by achieving high scores on AP exams.

Along with the provision of advanced courses, MTCA will offer a level of flexibility that will make it possible to provide each and every student a course load that is attuned to their particular strengths and interests. During the enrollment and placement process, students seeking enrichment and accelerated placements, may be placed in different curriculum levels for different subjects. For example, a sixth grader with a high aptitude in math could be placed in an eighth-grade math course, while continuing to take sixth grade level courses in other subjects. This level of flexibility will allow MTCA to provide an impressive level of personalization for the accelerated student.

In recognition of the fact that high-quality staff is essential to a strong education program, MTCA will provide professional learning on accelerated programming to all teachers, counselors, and administrators. These courses will cover topics ranging from affective education to student identification and will ensure that staff is well versed in the needs of every student.

Gifted students will thrive at MTCA. The ability for customization and individual programming and pacing in courses and the Honors/AP program for high school students, along with a flexible placement system will ensure students are provided the services required for the realization of their exceptional potentials. Furthermore, teachers will work closely with Learning Coaches to ensure a steady flow of enrichment activities for students working above grade level.

7.e Compliance with Applicable Laws and Regulations

MTCA will comply with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Section 504, and the Family Education Rights and Privacy (FERPA), the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and Rule 10 Chapter 16 of the Administrative Rules of Montana. The School will provide a free and appropriate public education to children with disabilities, as identified under such Acts and policies. These supports include, but are not limited to, identifying, evaluating children with disabilities, and planning individualized education programs that meet each student's unique needs, in accordance with state and federal requirements. MTCA special education leaders and intervention specialists will work closely with the general education curriculum teachers to ensure that every student receives accommodations, modifications, and all needed services to access and progress in the general education curriculum in the Least Restrictive Environment according to each student's Individualized Education Plan (IEP).

In accordance with Section 8 (1)(a) of the Public Charter Schools Act, MTCA will have an open enrollment policy: any eligible student in Montana can attend. The School does not discriminate in its admissions policies or practices based on geography, intellectual or athletic ability, measures of achievement or aptitude, status as a student with a disability, or test scores.

Services for students with disabilities (according to students' needs) will include, but will not be limited to:

- Direct special education intervention support for a student, as outlined within their IEP, which may be provided via small group or individual LiveLesson virtual classes, and/or one-on-one sessions over the telephone or as otherwise appropriate based upon each student's needs as determined by the IEP team.
- Direct related service support (e.g., speech-language, occupational or physical therapy, etc.) provided virtually, face-to-face, home-based, at community sites, or therapist offices. The location of service is determined based on student needs and appropriateness of the location for the service.
- Ongoing progress monitoring including frequent and thorough review of student performance, attendance, and participation data as reported to the student, parent, and teacher through their respective home pages.
- Regular progress reporting to parents at least as frequently as general education progress reporting.
- Ongoing support and guidance from special education staff to the general education teachers to provide appropriate accommodations and modifications, as per a student's IEP, to the general education curriculum.
- Careful logging in EMS of every conversation, contact (by phone, email message, LiveLesson session, or other means) and consultation with the student and/or parent as well as general education teachers.

- Specific tracking and reporting for providers of direct/related services, with scrutiny by the special education staff of any missed appointments or incomplete services.
- Conducting triennial evaluations, or every two years for students with Intellectual Disabilities, or more frequently as appropriate. Conducting IEP team meetings, including the parents, for all new students to adopt or amend the IEP, or conduct an Annual Review. Prior Written Notice detailing the decisions of the IEP team are provided to parents along with Parental Rights at least once annually and at appropriate instances when IEP revisions are made.

Procedural Safeguards Notice

Parents of children who receive or who may be eligible for special education services have rights under IDEA 2004. The Procedural Safeguards Notice provides a detailed explanation of those rights. MTCA will give parents a copy of the Procedural Safeguards Notice and the explanatory Procedural Safeguards Letter at least once each school year. Parents can also obtain a copy of the Procedural Safeguards Notice from MTCA at any time. An additional document will be available to help parents to better understand the Notice document. The Parents' Rights: Understanding the Procedural Safeguards Notice provides a summary of those rights. Parents will also receive the Parents' Rights documents upon initial referral or upon the parents request for an evaluation and in accordance with discipline procedures when a change in placement occurs.

Surrogate Parent

As part of the IEP process, MTCA will recognize a qualified adult must participate as the "parent" (34 CFR 300.30) for the student. A surrogate parent is someone who acts on the child's behalf in matters relating to the identification, evaluation, educational placement, and provision of FAPE to the child. MTCA will provide a surrogate parent as outlined by 34 CFR § 300.519. A surrogate will be appointed and trained on how to participate and make decisions on the child's behalf in the following situations as directed and limited by applicable state and federal laws and regulations: a biological, adoptive, foster, parent, or guardian are not available; a grandparent or step parent with whom the child lives or a person who is legally responsible for the child is not available; the child is an unaccompanied homeless youth without an adult who is able to act as an IDEA Parent.

MTCA will have a method in place to secure a surrogate when needed. When it is determined that a student is in need of a surrogate parent, the surrogate will be appointed within 30 calendar days.

MTCA will maintain a pool of trained parent surrogates and may collaborate with surrogate parents when additional surrogates are needed.

MTCA will not allow the following persons to be appointed as a surrogate parent: employees of an agency already involved in the care or education of the student; school employees; or persons with a potential conflict of interest.

Attendance Procedures

Entering attendance is expected to be taken seriously as a regular part of the school day for the Learning Coach. MTCA staff will verify that the attendance records are accurate, which includes not only the attendance hours recorded by the Learning Coach, but also the lesson and assignment completion rates and the amount of communication the student has with the teacher. During course design and alignment, lesson and assignment completion times are estimated, thus student lessons and assignment completion can be used to estimate the amount of student time spent on learning.

Student attendance will be verified regularly by both teachers and Learning Coaches and logged within the EMS. All students must complete assigned lessons and submit assessments. Students and/or their Learning Coaches must also participate in/respond to telephone calls, email messages, and/or web conferencing (LiveLesson sessions) contacts, as well as in-person contacts (if required) with a teacher during the School's regularly scheduled school hours.

If a teacher has concerns about the validity of a student's attendance records, they may revise the student's recorded hours of attendance-based work completion rates and/or contact the School Leader or attendance clerk for further assistance. The Learning Coach will be notified if attendance records are changed. Therefore, even if a Learning Coach records a high number of instructional hours in the attendance records, if a student's work completion rates are not on track and/or if they fail to communicate on a regular basis with the teacher, they will be flagged for review using an Approaching Alarm or Alarm status. This Approaching Alarm or Alarm status is displayed in the EMS and will require follow-up action from the School to ensure that the student completes his or her lessons, assessments, and required weekly hours of attendance. In reviewing attendance documentation, teachers must determine that each student has met or exceeded the required amount of instructional time stipulated by State regulations.

MTCA's administration will monitor and review attendance records on a weekly basis. After a predetermined amount of time (usually 10 days), the EMS will no longer allow a teacher or Learning Coach to edit past attendance records. Any requests for adjustments to the "locked" records must first go to the homeroom teacher (in writing via webmail) for review and approval and then to the School Administrator or attendance clerk for adjustment.

The expectations and procedures for attendance will be documented in the School Handbook, alongside the state requirements for weekly and annual hours of instruction. Parents must agree to the policies in the handbook when completing enrollment. Attendance procedures will be addressed in training for all stakeholders (Learning Coaches, students, teachers, and administrators).

Unexcused Absences and Truancy

Regular attendance is imperative to maximize student learning. MTCA will offer flexibility regarding how many hours each day students spend on schoolwork and which days of the week they complete that work. Parents will be held legally responsible for ensuring that their students are fully participating in school, even if they have designated another adult as their student's Learning Coach. Habitual truancy occurs when a student has reached 9 days of unexcused absences in a school year. If a student is identified as truant, a truancy plan will be developed to engage or re-engage the student in the education program and get his or her learning and assignment completion back on track. If engagement efforts fail, MTCA will follow Montana law in reporting non-attendance and truancy to the appropriate jurisdiction.

To avoid truancy, the parent must ensure that the following activities take place:

- The Caretaker or Learning Coach must enter attendance on a weekly basis in accordance with the requirements outlined in the School Handbook.
- The student completes assigned lessons and assessments.
- The student participates in educational activities for an appropriate number of hours, as outlined, and the Caretaker or Learning Coach records these attendance hours in the EMS on

a daily basis.

- The student is available for regularly scheduled telephone calls with teachers. These phone calls provide the opportunity for certified teachers to verify student learning and provide remediation and/or enrichment opportunities as appropriate.
- The student attends any assigned mandatory LiveLesson® sessions.
- The student is able to demonstrate that they are doing their own schoolwork.
- The student attends mandatory state testing.
- The Caretaker or Learning Coach has communicated with the homeroom teacher in advance if they need to deviate from the regular school calendar (for example, switching a vacation and school day).

8. Describe student discipline policies, including those for special education students.

8.a Student Discipline Policies

MTCA is committed to providing a safe, positive, productive, and nurturing educational environment for all its students, and conveys this commitment through its written policies in the form of the School Handbook, which all students must review as part of the enrollment process, and its collaboratively developed school culture. The general School Handbook is included in Appendix E.

The School Handbook will include a clear and fair set of roles and responsibilities for students, Learning Coaches, and School staff that complies with the students' due process rights and aligns with the School's mission.

Appropriate conduct will be expected of all students. As a personalized, high-expectation online school, MTCA anticipates being able to effectively manage student discipline issues. The expectations for student conduct will be explained in the handbook and will include steps to be followed in the event of a policy violation. The School will follow formal due process procedures to manage the discipline of students. In addition, the online curriculum will allow the School to minimize academic interruptions caused by suspensions; students may be expected to work regardless of their disciplinary status.

MTCA will regard academic honesty as key to its mission, and will expect all stakeholders to understand that 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. By engaging in academic misconduct, students cheat themselves of the opportunity to fully develop their intellectual abilities. As part of the School start-up tasks, all students will be required to sign the Honor Code indicating their understanding of the expectations of academic honesty. It will be expected that students will adhere to the Honor Code throughout the school year, and that all schoolwork submitted to meet course or class requirements represents the original work of the student. The Honor Code will serve to reinforce students' commitment to academic excellence and integrity. Students and parents suspected of inappropriate academic behavior will be confronted immediately and subjected to standard disciplinary action as described in the handbook.

Policies for Student Expulsion and Suspension

All students enrolled in MTCA are expected to conduct themselves in accordance with the rules for the School, and Caretakers and Learning Coaches are expected to cooperate with the School staff in helping students to maintain this conduct.

Student codes of conduct are set forth in the School Handbook. Students are guaranteed due process of law as required by the 14th Amendment to the Constitution. The school will abide by all federal, state,

and local policies and guidelines for Discipline and Due Process for Students and shall not impose requirements or consequences that are inconsistent with these policies and guidelines.

Discipline Measures

There are three levels of formal disciplinary measures that will be utilized by the School: 1) Warning, 2) Suspension, and 3) Expulsion. Each level and its corresponding disciplinary actions are identified below.

1. Warning

Students who receive warnings from the School will have a conference (via phone or in person) with their Caretaker and the School Administrator(s), and the incident will be formally documented in writing and will become part of the student's permanent record. The student will not have a disruption in schooling and will continue to have access to the EMS.

Warnings are issued when a student demonstrates a breach of expected conduct, but not as serious as those identified under the suspension and/or expulsion categories.

2. Suspension

A student may be suspended from the School for good cause. When a student is suspended, they are temporarily removed from class (the EMS) or a School sponsored program or activity. The length of a suspension is determined by the School administrator (up to 10 days at a time). A suspension will be documented in writing and will become part of a student's permanent record.

During a period of suspension as defined by the School Leader, a student's permission to log on to and/or use parts of the EMS is restricted. Student access to email, message boards, online clubs/activities, or all access to the EMS may be revoked. In cases where the student's access is completely revoked, the Learning Coach is responsible for logging on to the EMS and obtaining the student's assignments, responding to email, and recording assessment responses for the student. The student should continue with their schoolwork during a suspension.

Violations that may lead to suspension include, but are not limited to, the following breaches of conduct (depending on severity):

1. Cheating on tests or daily work: A student who knowingly participates in copying, using another's work, and representing it as their own (for example, students transmitting their work electronically for another student's use), or who provides other students with test answers, answer keys, or otherwise uses unauthorized materials in an assignment or assessment situation.
2. Plagiarism: A student's use of another person's words, products, or ideas without proper acknowledgement of the original work with the intention of passing it off as their own. Plagiarism may occur deliberately (with the intention to deceive) or accidentally (due to poor referencing). It includes copying material from a book, copying-and-pasting information from the Internet, and getting family or friends to help with coursework.
3. Abusive conduct: A student who uses abusive language or engages in abusive conduct in the presence of others either in person or electronically/virtually.
4. Bullying: Means any threatening, insulting, or demeaning gesture or physical conduct, including any intentional written, verbal, or electronic communication or threat directed against a student regardless of the underlying reason for such conduct that: causes or places a student in reasonable fear of physical or mental harm, damages property; substantially interferes with a student's access to the educational program; or substantially disrupts the orderly operation of the School.

5. Hazing: A student who engages in or coerces a student into behavior that is intentionally meant to cause another person to fear harm or injury, be frightened into submission or compliance, or to feel a sense of inferiority, or for the student to be initiated into or affiliated with a student activity, team, club or any other purpose.
6. Harassment: A student who demonstrates verbal, written, graphic, or physical conduct relating to an individual's sex, race, color, national origin, age, religious beliefs, ethnic background, or disability that is sufficiently severe, pervasive, or persistent so as to interfere with or limit the ability of an individual to participate in or benefit from the School's programs that: 1) has the purpose or effect of creating an intimidating or hostile environment, 2) unreasonably interferes with an individual's educational performance, or 3) otherwise adversely affects an individual's educational opportunities.
7. Vandalism: A student who intentionally damages or destroys School property or records (physical or electronic). In these instances, the School reserves the right to contact the proper law enforcement agency(ies).
8. Theft and robbery: A student who takes money or other property (physical or electronic) with the intent to deprive another person or the School of that property. The threat or the use of force or violence is considered a serious breach of conduct. In these instances, the School reserves the right to contact the proper law enforcement agency.
9. Sexual harassment: A student who subjects another to any unwelcome sexual advances including verbal harassment, unwelcome or inappropriate touching, or suggestions, requests, or demands for sexual favors.
10. Sexting: Sending sexually explicit messages or photographs, primarily between mobile phones, such as sending a text message with a sexual image.
11. Violence within a dating relationship: a student who attempts to maintain power and/or control over a dating partner through violence, threats of violence, and/or physical, emotional, and/or mental abuse.
12. Violation of acceptable use policy: Students who violate the acceptable use policy in one form or another are open to disciplinary action including suspension. This would include signing on as parents.
13. Repeated violation of any disciplinary issues.

3. Expulsion

When a student is expelled, they are separated from the School for a period longer than 20 days, or permanently, for disciplinary reasons. An expulsion will be documented in writing and will become part of a student's permanent record.

Violations that may lead to expulsion include, but are not limited to, any behavior that indicates that a student is a serious threat to the safety of others: possession of firearms (mandatory 1 year expulsion), dangerous weapons, bombs, or explosives, criminal behavior, arson, under the influence of or possession of, or sale of controlled substances or paraphernalia. Suspensions or expulsions for children designated as exceptional follow all appropriate state and federal policies, regulations, and laws.

The student has the right to a due process hearing that includes the summary of allegations and the opportunity to respond to the stated allegations. If a student is found to have not violated the possession of firearms policy, the allegation will be expunged from the student's records.

8.b Student Discipline Policies for Special Education Students

The School Handbook will include practices the School will use to promote effective discipline, a list of offenses (such as bullying and sexual harassment) which may result in suspension or expulsion, an explanation of the rights of students with disabilities, and policies and procedure for due process. MTCA will establish and adopt suspension and expulsion policies that will be distributed in the School Handbook. MTCA's discipline, suspension, and expulsion policies will be in accordance with student's rights and with applicable law.

MTCA will not discriminate in its discipline policies or practices on the basis of intellectual ability, status as a person with a disability, proficiency in the English language, or any other basis that would be illegal under applicable state and/or federal laws.

MTCA personnel may consider any unique circumstances on a case-by-case basis, when determining whether a change of placement, made in accordance with the following requirements related to discipline, is appropriate for a child with a disability who violates a school code of student conduct.

To the extent that they also take such action for children without disabilities, School personnel may, for not more than 10 consecutive school days, remove a child with a disability (other than a child with an intellectual disability) who violates a code of student conduct from his/her current placement to an appropriate interim alternative educational setting, another setting, or suspension. School personnel may also impose additional removals of the child of not more than 10 consecutive school days in that same school year for separate incidents of misconduct, as long as those removals do not constitute a change of placement or exceed 15 cumulative school days in a school year. Once a child with a disability has been removed from his or her current placement for a total of 10 school days in the same school year, MTCA must, during any subsequent days of removal in that school year, provide services to the extent required.

If the behavior that violated the student code of conduct was not a manifestation of the child's disability and the disciplinary change of placement would exceed 10 consecutive school days, School personnel may apply the disciplinary procedures to that child with a disability in the same manner and for the same duration as it would to children without disabilities, except that the School must provide services to that child as described herein under Services. The child's IEP Team determines the interim alternative educational setting for such services.

The services that must be provided to a child with a disability who has been removed from the child's current placement may be provided in an interim alternative educational setting. MTCA will only be required to provide services to a child with a disability who has been removed from his/her current placement for 10 school days or less in that school year, if it provides services to a child without disabilities who has been similarly removed. Students may have the responsibility to make up exams and work missed while being disciplined by suspension and may be permitted to complete these assignments within guidelines established by MTCA.

A child with a disability who is removed from the child's current placement for more than 10 consecutive school days must continue to receive educational services, so as to enable the child to continue to participate in the general education curriculum, although in another setting, and to progress toward meeting the goals set out in the child's IEP; and receive, as appropriate, a functional behavioral assessment, and behavioral intervention services and modifications that are designed to address the behavior violation so that it does not happen again.

After a child with a disability has been removed from his/her current placement for 10 school days during one school year, or if current removal is for 10 consecutive school days or less, and if the removal is not a change of placement, then School personnel, in consultation with at least one of the child's teachers, will determine the extent to which services will be needed to enable the child to continue to participate in the general education curriculum, although in another setting, and to progress toward meeting the goals set out in the child's IEP.

If the removal is a change of placement, the child's IEP Team will determine the appropriate services to enable the child to continue to participate in the general education curriculum, although in another setting, and to progress toward meeting the goals set out in the child's IEP.

SCHOOL GOVERNANCE

9. Describe the public charter school’s organizational chart that clearly presents the proposed organizational structure, including lines of authority and reporting between the governing board, staff, related bodies such as advisory bodies or parent and teacher councils, and external organizations that will play a role in managing the public charter school.

9. Organizational Chart & Structure with Lines of Authority & Reporting

The organizational charts with lines of authority and reporting for the five years of the charter are shown on the following pages.

Figure 10. Organizational Structure

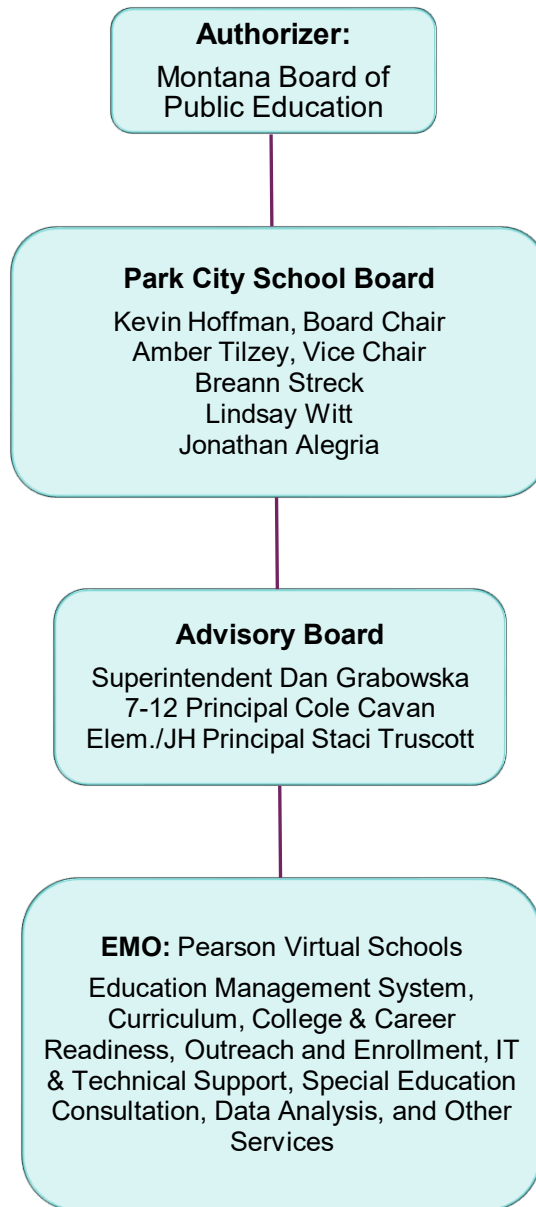


Figure 11. School Staffing Structure for Year 1: Total Staff = 19.5

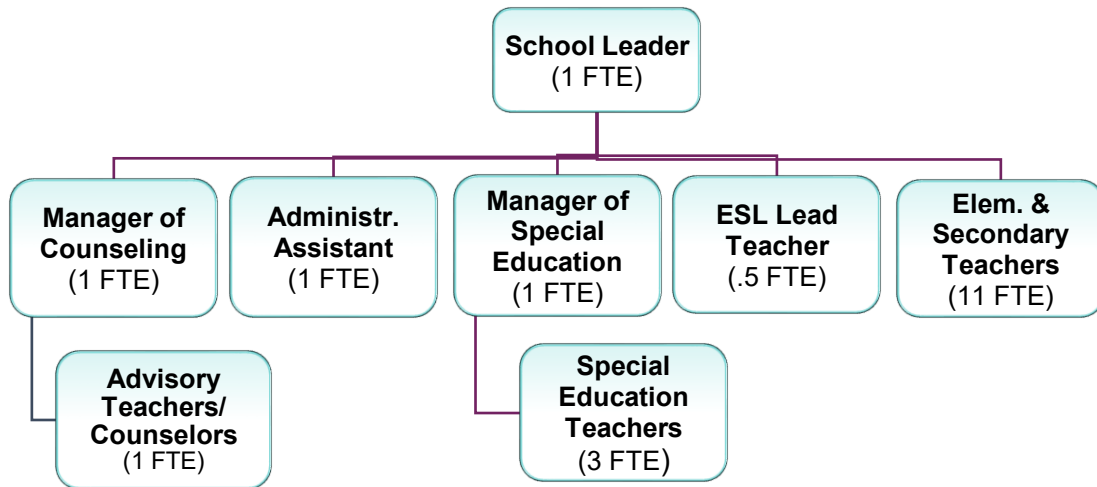


Figure 12. School Staffing Structure for Year 2: Total Staff = 34.5

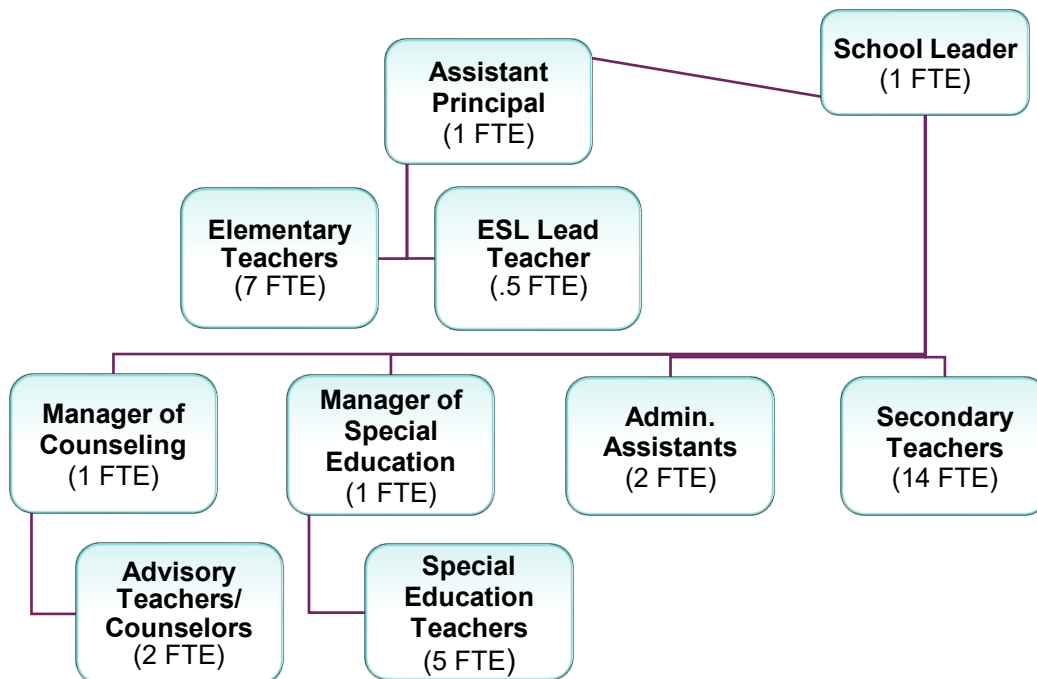


Figure 13. School Staffing Structure for Year 3: Total Staff = 46.5

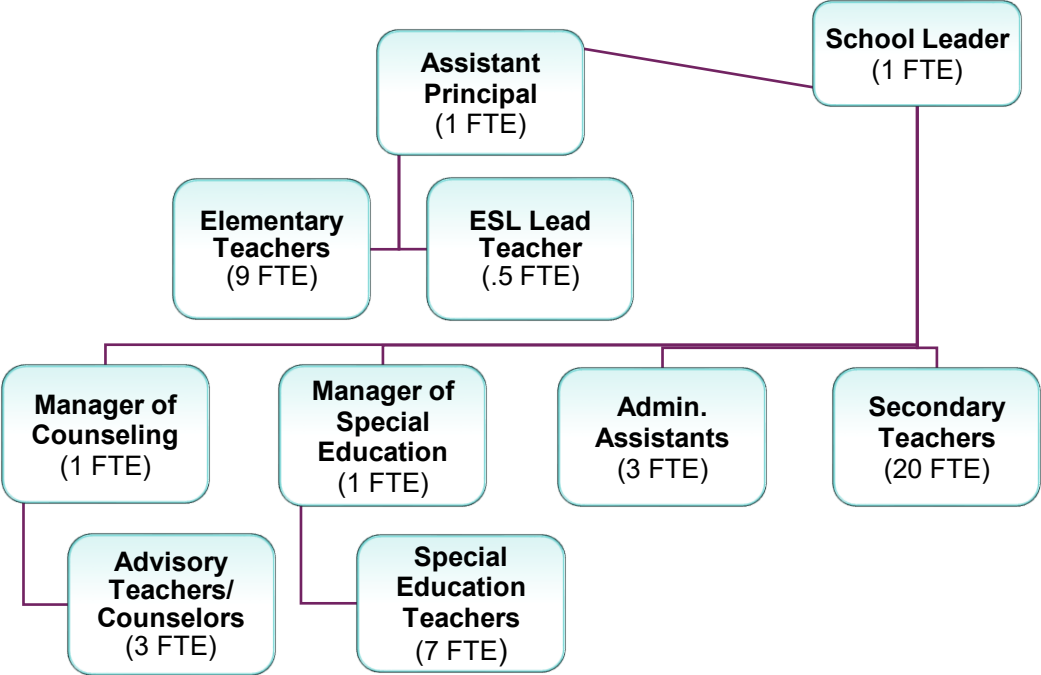


Figure 14. School Staffing Structure for Year 4: Total Staff = 53.5

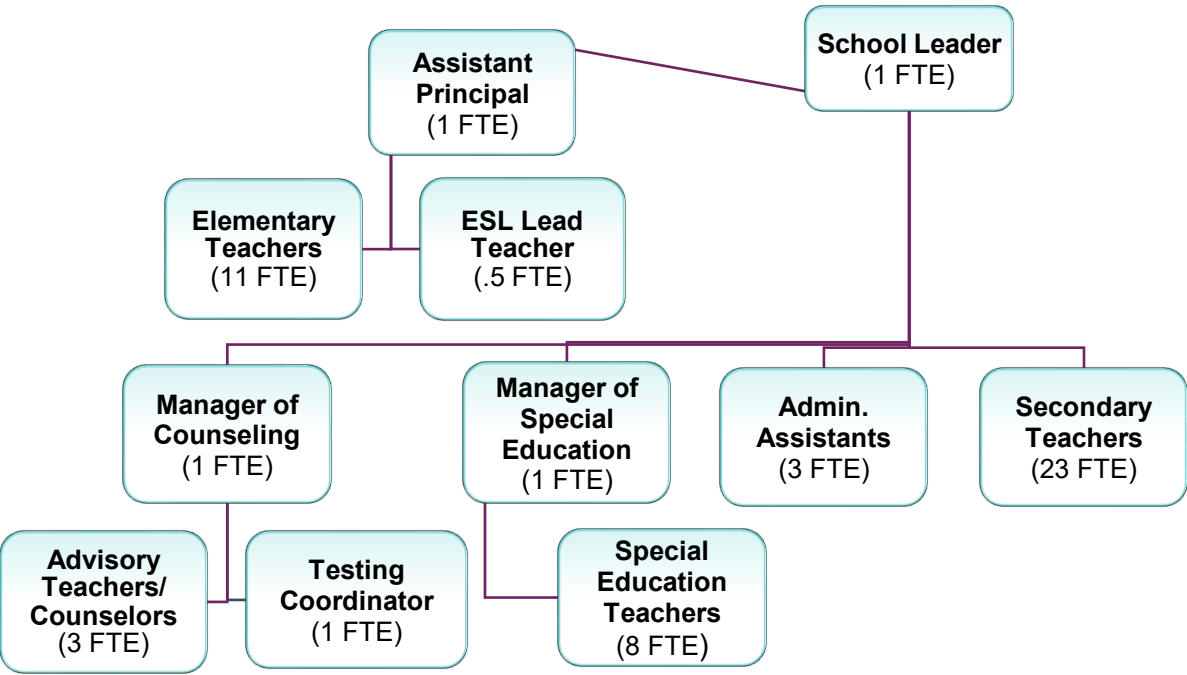
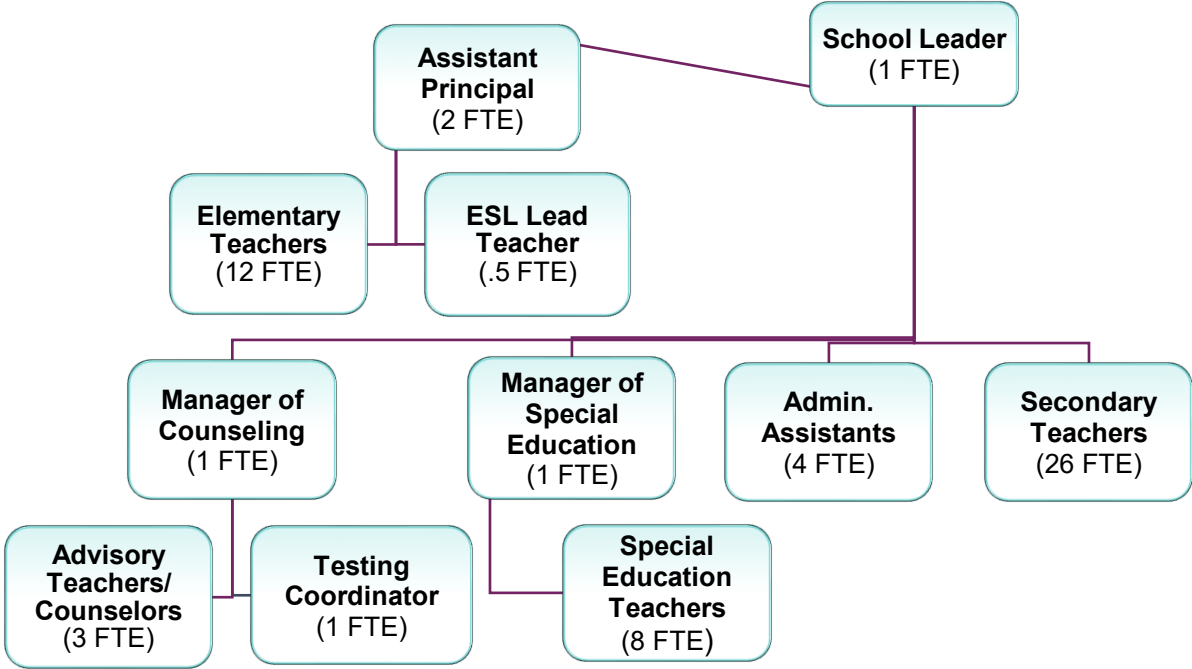


Figure 15. School Staffing Structure for Year 5: Total Staff = 59.5



10. Describe the roles and responsibilities of the governing board, the proposed leadership management team, and other entities shown in the organizational chart.

10.a Roles & Responsibilities of the Governing Board

The Park City School Board (the Board) will oversee the policy decisions, academic success, and financial health of the School, and will establish and appoint members of an Advisory Board to provide recommendations and insight regarding the public charter school's operations. The School Leader will manage the day-to-day operation of the School with the support of the administrative team. While implementing the policies and procedures of the Board and the recommendations of the Advisory Board, the School Leader and leadership staff will in turn supervise and support the teaching staff. The Advisory Board will meet frequently with the School Leader and provide regular updates on school progress to the Park City School Board.

The Board will set policy and select contractors, including those providing the School's day-to-day operations, curriculum, technology, and instructional services. The Board is also responsible for fiscal oversight and ensures the School meets the terms of its charter contract. The Board will also execute and oversee MTCA's contract with Pearson and will hold Pearson accountable for ensuring that the School meets its obligations.

Park City School Board

Board Chairperson

The Board Chairperson, Mr. Kevin Hoffman, has nine years' experience on the Board and is in his third year as Board Chairperson. Mr. Hoffman also serves as a finance officer at Faith Chapel in Billings. Prior to his 23 years of support at Faith Chapel, Mr. Hoffman was the business owner of Hoffman Dairy. He

earned his Bachelor of Science degree in Computer Science from Montana Technological University, and his certificate of Pastoral Ministry from Yellowstone Valley Bible Institute.

The Board elects a Chairperson from its members for a one (1) year term. The Chairperson may be any trustee of the board, including an additional trustee as provided for in 20-3-352(2). If an additional Trustee is chosen to serve as the Chairperson of an elementary district described in 20-3-351(1)(a), the additional trustee may not vote on issues pertaining only to the elementary district.

The responsibilities of the Chairperson include the following:

- Preside at all meetings and conduct meetings in the manner prescribed by the Board's policies;
- Make all Board committee appointments, subject to Board approval;
- Sign all papers and documents as required by law and as authorized by action of the Board;
- Close Board meetings as authorized by Montana law; and
- Act as spokesperson for the Board.

The Chairperson is permitted to participate in all Board meetings in a manner equal to all other Board members, including the right to participate in debate and to vote. The Chairperson may not make a motion but may second motions.

Board Vice Chairperson

The Board Vice Chairperson is Ms. Amber Tilzey, who has six years of experience on the Board. Ms. Tilzey is a nurse in Billings as well as an active Park City Schools parent. The Vice Chairperson presides at all Board meetings in the absence of the Chairperson and performs all the duties of the Chairperson during the Chairperson's absence or unavailability. The Vice Chairperson works closely with the Chairperson and assumes whatever duties the Chairperson may delegate.

Board Clerk

The Clerk of the Board, currently filled by Lisa Reynolds, attends all meetings of the Board, unless excused by the Chair, and keeps an accurate journal of its proceedings. The Clerk has custody of the records, books, and documents of the Board. In the absence or inability of the Clerk to attend a Board meeting, the Board will designate a person to serve as Clerk for the meeting have one (1) of their members or a District employee act as clerk for the meeting, and said person will supply the Clerk with a certified copy of the proceedings.

The Clerk keeps accurate and detailed accounts of all receipts and disbursements made by the District. The Clerk draws and countersigns all warrants for expenditures that have been approved by the Board of Trustees. The Clerk makes the preparations legally required for the notice and conduct of all District elections.

The Clerk prepares and submits to the Board a financial report of receipts and disbursements of all school funds on an annual basis unless the Board requests such reports on a more frequent basis. The Clerk performs other duties as prescribed by state law or as directed by the Board.

Duties of Individual Trustees

The authority of individual Trustees is limited to participating in actions taken by the Board as a whole when legally in session. Trustees shall not assume responsibilities of administrators or other staff members. The Board or staff shall not be bound by an action taken or statement made by an individual Trustee except when such statement or action is pursuant to specific instructions and official action taken by the Board. The Trustees are committed to the sponsorship of the proposed charter school and have knowledge, capabilities, and support to sponsor and adhere to the legal obligations for the School.

Each Trustee shall review the agenda and any study materials distributed prior to the meeting and be prepared to participate in the discussion and decision-making for each agenda item. Each Trustee shall visit each school not less than once per year to examine its management, conditions and needs.

Each member is obligated to attend Board meetings regularly. Whenever possible, each Trustee shall give notice to the Chair or Superintendent of the Trustee's inability to attend a Board meeting. A majority of the Board may excuse a Trustee's absence from a meeting if requested to do so. The Board shall declare a position vacant after three (3) consecutive unexcused absences from regular Board meetings or if the Trustee has been absent from the District for sixty (60) consecutive days.

The additional Trustees of the Board include the following individuals:

- Breann Streck has served on the Board for three years. Ms. Streck works in the medical field.
- Ms. Lindsay Witt is currently in her third year on the Board. Ms. Witt is a former teacher and is currently a full-time parent.
- Jonathan Alegria is in his second year on the Board. Mr. Alegria also works as a volunteer fire department member as well as a handyman.

MTCA Advisory Board

The MTCA Advisory Board will closely review the School's progress in meeting the charter goals. The Advisory Board is led by Superintendent Dan Grabowska, who brings 10 years of experience at Park City Schools, 20 years of leadership and teaching experience in online learning, and 30 years total in education. Prior to his time with Park City Schools, Superintendent Grabowska served as a Principal at Florence Carlton High School for seven years and Principal at Salmon School District, ID, for five years. Superintendent Grabowska received his education at Montana State University-Bozeman. Superintendent Grabowska has extensive experience in online learning including both teaching, administration, and governance.

Ms. Staci Truscott is the second member of the Advisory Board. She is currently an Elementary Principal for Park City Schools and have three years of experience with the District and 27 years' experience in education. Ms. Truscott earned her Bachelor of Science degree in Elementary Education and Teaching at Lewis-Clark State College, and her Master of Science degree in Education, Educational Leadership and Administration from Capella University.

Mr. Cole Cavan is the third member of the Advisory Board. He currently services as High School Principal with Park City Schools and is in his second year with the District. Mr. Cavan brings nine years of experience in education to his role for MTCA.

10.b Roles & Responsibilities of the Proposed Leadership Management Team

School Leader

The School Leader will meet all Montana requirements and will ideally hold an advanced degree with a minimum of five years teaching experience and administrative experience. A former School Leader or School Leader who has experience in a virtual school setting or is technologically proficient with good communication skills is preferred. The School Leader will build consensus and inspire teachers to teach, students to learn, and parents to engage in their child's learning while following the mission of the School. The School Leader will hold appropriate administrative certification. Daily management of the School will be the School Leader's responsibility while overall governance will be the responsibility of the Board.

Assistant Principal

Beginning in Year Two, the Assistant Principal will work collaboratively with the School Leader and will manage all the site-based school operations, exclusive of Special Education. The Assistant Principal will help the School Leader with implementation of the instructional program, including managing staff members. Additionally, they will work closely with the enrollment, technical support, materials management, fulfillment, finance, human resources, payroll, and facilities management functions. They will manage a range of special projects, such as oversight of mandated annual testing.

Manager of Special Education

The Manager of Special Education will be responsible for managing special education site-based school operations. This includes reviewing the student's documentation (IEP, Section 504 plan, and Evaluation Reports), recommending course placement, managing special education teachers, liaising with school districts, maintaining required compliance timelines, adhering to policies and procedures outlined by IDEA, Section 504, and Montana Board of Public Education, ensuring specialized direct instruction is delivered, organizing related service providers, and monitoring accommodation and modification implementation.

Manager of Counseling

The Manager of Counseling will work with the School leadership team to ensure that each student successfully completes their instructional program. The Manager of Counseling will provide direction to staff and will assist students and parents in understanding and meeting graduation requirements, course selection and scheduling, post-secondary school planning, social/emotional needs, and crisis intervention.

Administrative Assistants

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

10.c Other Entities in the Organizational Chart

Education Management Organization

MTCA anticipates contracting with Pearson to provide the educational products and services the Board has agreed on. The Board will maintain ultimate control of the online public charter school. An agreement with the proposed provider that will be drafted upon approval of the application will detail the services provided including services such as Education Management System; Curriculum and Professional Development; College and Career Readiness; Success Partners; Outreach and Enrollment; Counseling & Advisory Support; IT and Technical Support; Special Education Consultation; and Data Analysis. The Board plans to contract with Pearson for the benefit of a smooth school start up, quality academic materials for students, and national best practices expertise and guidance. Pearson has a proven record of success collaborating with public online schools and consistently strong ratings from parents. Connections Academy by Pearson supports 47 schools in 29 states throughout the country. In the Northwest, Connections Academy has supported schools for over 15 years in Idaho, Wyoming, Utah, Colorado, Oregon, Washington, and Nevada.

11. Provide a staffing chart for the public charter school’s first year and a staffing plan for the term of the public charter school.

11. Staffing Chart for the First Year & the Term of the Public Charter School

The table below shows the staffing chart for the first year and the remaining four years of the term and is based on the assumption of a 13.4% Special Education population.

Staff	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
12 Month					
School Leader	1	1	1	1	1
Assistant Principal	0	1	1	1	2
Manager of Counseling	1	1	1	1	1
Manager of Special Education	1	1	1	1	1
Administrative Assistant	1	2	3	3	4
10 Month					
Elementary Teachers (K-5)	4	7	9	11	12
Secondary Teachers (6-12)	7	14	20	23	26
Counselors/Advisory Teachers	1	2	3	3	3
Special Population Teachers	3	5	7	8	8
ESL Lead Teacher	.5	.5	.5	.5	.5
Testing Coordinator	0	0	0	1	1
Staff Totals	19.5	34.5	46.5	53.5	59.5
Student Totals	505	960	1280	1485	1630

12. Detail the public charter school startup plan, identifying tasks, timelines, and responsible individuals.

12. Start-Up Plan with Tasks, Timelines, and Responsible Individuals

The table below provides a detailed start-up plan for the proposed public charter school. The responsible individuals are shown in the gray-shaded rows with exceptions included in parentheses by individual tasks, as applicable.

TASKS	Sep '23	Oct '23	Nov '23	Dec '23	Jan '24	Feb '24	Mar '24	Apr '24	May '24	Jun '24	Jul '24	Aug '24
APPLICATION												
Responsible Individuals: The Board with support from Pearson												
Submit charter application (The Board)		X										
BPE evaluates application (BPE)		X	X	X	X							
GOVERNANCE												
Responsible Individuals: The Board												
Review and Approve Employee and Student Handbooks		X										



TASKS	Sep '23	Oct '23	Nov '23	Dec '23	Jan '24	Feb '24	Mar '24	Apr '24	May '24	Jun '24	Jul '24	Aug '24
Hold Regular Meetings	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
LEGAL												
Responsible Individuals: The Board												
Draft contract with the Pearson					X	X						
Review and execute Charter					X	X						
Provide overall school-level governance	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
PERSONNEL												
Responsible Individuals: Board/Pearson												
Determine payroll and benefits compliance (Hiring Committee)	X	X										
Establish staffing model (Hiring Committee)	X	X										
Determine certification and background check requirements (Pearson)		X	X									
Approve Employee Handbook and employment policies (The Board)			X									
Recruit School Leader candidates (Hiring Committee)						X	X					
Review School Leader candidates (Hiring Committee)						X	X					
Select School Leader (Hiring Committee)							X	X				
Train School Leader (Hiring Committee)								X	X	X	X	X
Recruit remaining staff (School Leader & Hiring Committee)							X	X	X	X	X	X
Train staff (School Leader & Pearson)											X	X
FACILITY												
Responsible Individuals: Park City Schools/Pearson (excluding lease intent letter); Please note that the School plans to utilize space within Park City Schools in Year 1. This timeline is for subsequent years or will be used as a back-up plan.												
Identify/tour sites		X	X									
Select preliminary Sites/RFPs			X	X								
Procure letter of intent to lease with potential landlords (The Board)				X	X							
Renovate & build-out						X	X	X	X	X		
Secure inspections/Certificate of Occupancy								X	X	X	X	X
Move-In for school start											X	X
CURRICULUM												
Responsible Individuals: Pearson												

TASKS	Sep '23	Oct '23	Nov '23	Dec '23	Jan '24	Feb '24	Mar '24	Apr '24	May '24	Jun '24	Jul '24	Aug '24
Verify state course codes	X	X									X	X
Fine-tune alignments to state standards		X							X			
Determine course limits and/or restrictions			X									
Complete any necessary curriculum enhancements			X	X	X	X	X	X	X			
STUDENT RECRUITMENT												
Responsible Individuals: Pearson												
Determine outreach budget		X										
Create website					X							
Launch website						X						
Develop and implement outreach plan (grassroots, PR, advertising, online marketing, collateral, etc.)		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Develop and implement virtual info session materials			X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Host parent/student information sessions or provide on demand recordings		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
STUDENT ENROLLMENT												
Responsible Individuals: Pearson												
Student application period						X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Enrollment period							X	X	X	X	X	X
Hold Student/Parent orientation								X	X	X	X	X
FINANCE												
Responsible Individuals: The Board, with support from Pearson												
Finalize and approve school budget (The Board)									X			
Determine eligibility and application process for Title and or IDEA funding (Pearson)												X
Establish external data reporting protocols/ processes (Pearson)											X	X
Validate State Legal Entity created and authorized and required regulatory reporting (Pearson)										X	X	X
STUDENT SERVICES												
Responsible Individuals: Park City Schools and Pearson												
Determine requirements for Special Education and English Learners	X	X										

TASKS	Sep '23	Oct '23	Nov '23	Dec '23	Jan '24	Feb '24	Mar '24	Apr '24	May '24	Jun '24	Jul '24	Aug '24
Research IEP enrollment age specifications	X	X										
Confirm minimum graduation requirements (credits and course requirements)	X	X										
Work with School Leader to create progression plan(s)	X	X						X	X			
TECHNOLOGY												
Responsible Individuals: Pearson												
Determine technology offering rules		X										
Develop a Technology Plan, determine the approval process		X										
Install technology at site; test technology prior to school opening							X	X	X	X	X	X
STATE TESTING												
Responsible Individuals: MTCA Leadership Team with support from Pearson												
Determine state test requirements and dates		X										
Determine the proficiency levels for the state assessment		X										
Create a state testing plan							X	X	X	X	X	
Secure testing venues											X	

13. Describe the plans for recruiting and developing school leadership and staff.

13. Plans for Recruiting & Developing School Leadership and Staff

Recruiting School Leadership & Staff

The school leadership team for MTCA will be recruited and hired following approval of the application. It is anticipated that the recruiting of the School Leader will begin immediately upon approval of the application, as the School Leader needs to be hired prior to teacher and staff recruitment.

The search process will begin with developing a comprehensive job description, including minimum qualifications and requirements, and posting the position and advertising through multiple avenues. Strategies to attract highly qualified staff will be implemented to include posting on several targeted recruitment sites as well as posting on the professional and institutional websites that may include Aurora Institute, National Charter School Association, Teachers-Teachers.com, and National Association of Secondary School Principals. The interview process will consist of the following stages: 1) sourcing and screening resumes/applications; 2) prescreening digital interview; 3) live digital interview; 4) virtual panel interview; 5) professional reference check and background check; and 6) final interview.

Criteria for Selecting and Retaining the School Leader

The School Leader will meet all Montana requirements and will ideally hold an advanced degree with a minimum of five years teaching experience and administrative experience. A former School Leader or School Leader who has experience in a virtual school setting or is technologically proficient with good communication skills is preferred. The School Leader will build consensus and inspire teachers to teach, students to learn, and parents to engage in their child's learning while following the mission of the School. The School Leader will be responsible for the overall school operation, including carrying out the vision and mission of the School, managing the budget, working with the Board, managing staff, legal compliance, and interfacing with the Montana Board of Public Education and other governmental agencies. The School Leader will hold appropriate administrative certification.

The School Leader will be offered a competitive compensation with annual performance and salary reviews. In addition, the School Leader will have access to a competitive benefits package. The School Leader will also receive annual paid time off to include holidays, vacation and sick leave, as well as additional forms of paid leave such as bonding leave, serious illness in the family leave, bereavement leave, and jury duty leave, as needed.

Daily management of the School will be the School Leader's responsibility while overall governance will be the responsibility of the Board. The School Leader will be evaluated annually based upon performance. Annual performance will be based upon meeting school goals, evaluation of assigned competencies, and input from other key stakeholders. The evaluation system will be reviewed and approved by the Park City Schools Board. The School will adopt pay structures, performance criteria, a performance appraisal system, and disciplinary policies for all employees, including the School Leader. Explanation of such policies will be integrated into an Employee Handbook.

Minimum Professional Qualifications and/or Experience: The School Leader will hold appropriate administrative certification; preferably hold an advanced degree; have a minimum of five years' teaching experience and administrative experience.

Hiring Timeline: Critical Target Dates

- **Leadership:** MTCA's School Leader will be hired by April 2024 (by the April Board Meeting). The School Leader will participate in the hiring of the Manager of Counseling, Manager of Special Education, and Administrative Assistant, which will be filled by May 2024 (by the May Board Meeting).
- **Staffing:** 75% of the Instructional Staff will be hired by June 1, 2024, with work start and salaries beginning in July.

School Leader Hiring Plan Summary:

Action Step	Timeline
Establish a Timeline and Post the Position.	
Create a timeline for the Hiring Process.	Complete
Establish a School Leader Hiring Committee.	Due January 15, 2024
Post School Leader Position.	Due February 1, 2024
Develop the Process.	
Develop the Hiring Process and Timeline.	January 2024
Conduct the Hiring Process.	
Conduct an Initial Review of all submitted Applications, Cover Letters and Resumes.	Due February 10, 2024
Exclude any candidates who do not meet the minimum qualifications for this position. Those who meet the qualifications move to Round 1 – Pre-screening digital Interview.	Due February 15, 2024
Conduct First Round of Interviews – Pre-screening digital Interviews.	February 19–March 1, 2024
Hiring Committee individually reviews and evaluates all pre-screening digital interviews, using a common scoring rubric.	Due March 7, 2024
The top candidates move to Round 2, the Live Virtual Interview.	March 7, 2024
Hiring Committee conducts Live Virtual Interviews. Each committee member uses a scoring rubric.	March 14–20, 2024
The top two candidates move to Round 3, the Virtual Panel Interview.	Due March 21, 2024
The Hiring Committee conducts Virtual Panel Interviews. Each committee member uses a scoring rubric.	Due April 1, 2024
Top candidate is identified, and the hiring process is initiated.	April 5, 2024

Recruiting and Hiring School Staff

The School will recruit staff through a variety of channels, including traditional methods for posting job opportunities, plus networking with educational organizations, and special outreach to teachers and administrators who are seeking an innovative educational environment. Ideally, teachers will be hired at least 30 days prior to the start of the school year. In addition, all candidates will undergo thorough screening procedures including background checks and comprehensive reference checks, as well as any additional checks as required by state law.

The School will review all documentation to ensure that all employees have the necessary documentation and experience. If an employee has not submitted the necessary documentation, the Human Resources team will contact the employee to ensure that the documentation is produced. The School Leader will lead the recruitment and hiring of the remaining 10-month school staff to ensure MTCA is staffed by well-trained and effective online learning professionals.

The School will be staffed by Montana-certified teachers for all core subjects who will be specially trained in online delivery and personalized instruction. Core content teachers will be qualified based on content area, grade level and other aspects that may cause variations in the eligibility process. The majority of the teachers will work remotely delivering instruction to an online classroom of students and working one-on-one with students through highly interactive, technology-facilitated communication tools. Teachers will maintain a one-on-one relationship with each student.

Virtual learning requires an additional skill set and professional development. A focus on individualizing education for students and a high level of comfort with technology will be included in screening candidates for teaching positions. In partnering with Pearson, high-quality, Montana-certified teachers knowledgeable in their content areas will be attracted to join the team. With their solid content knowledge and passion for individualizing instruction, the Board will engage Pearson's professional development services to provide them with the necessary skills and pedagogy to teach online and maximize their skill set.

Following are outlines of the qualifications and experience required for school staff.

Teachers

Minimum Professional Qualifications and/or Experience: All teachers will hold the state-mandated certification/endorsements to teach within their content area and shall possess working knowledge of the Multi-Tiered System of Supports process; strong technology skills; excellent communication skills, both oral and written; be highly organized and punctual; have a willingness to travel on occasion for outreach and state testing events; ability to work remotely; and ability to work some occasional evening hours, as needed to support students and families.

Special Education Teachers

Minimum Professional Qualifications and/or Experience: Special Education teachers will have a degree in Special Education or related Education Field, a valid Special Education credential in Montana, experience in policy (IDEA) and/or administration with Special Education, strong technology skills, excellent communication skills, both oral and written, a customer-focused approach, a high degree of flexibility, the demonstrated ability to work well in fast-paced environment, and a team player track record.

ESL Lead Teacher

Qualifications/Experiences include being appropriately certified to teach English Learners (appropriate to grade level responsibilities) in Montana; ESOL endorsement or certification required; experience directly teaching English Learners; bilingual preferred; strong technology skills; excellent communication skills, both oral and written; willingness to travel for school-based meetings, trainings, outreach and state testing events; ability to work remotely; and ability to work some occasional evening hours, as needed to support some families.

Counselors

Minimum Professional Qualifications and/or Experience: Counselors will be required to have a counseling certification. Qualifications include Montana professional school counselor certification; minimum of a master's degree in school counseling; strong technology skills; excellent communication skills, both oral and written; excellent attention to detail and organizational skills; and willingness to travel on occasion for outreach and state testing events (may require occasional overnight travel).

Advisory Teachers

Secondary students in grades 6-12 will be assigned advisory teachers upon enrollment. These teachers will work closely with the students and the Learning Coaches to acclimate them to the online learning experience. Minimum Professional Qualifications and/or Experience: Qualifications include Montana Teacher Certification, strong technology skills (especially with Microsoft Office products and Google Suite), and excellent communication skills, both oral and written.

Assistant Principal

Minimum Professional Qualifications and/or Experience: Qualifications will include Montana Administrative certification; a minimum of 5 years of relevant work experience (teaching and/or administrative); some operational or logistics experience and/or administrative or management experience; relevant advanced degree is required, education experience required; excellent communication skills, both oral and written; demonstrated ability to work well in a fast-paced environment; be technologically proficient; experience in managing people a plus; and ability to travel as needed. The Assistant Principal will be mentored and supported as a plan for succession to the School Leader.

Manager of Special Education

Minimum Professional Qualifications and/or Experience: Qualifications for the Manager of Special Education include a minimum of 5 years of special education teaching experience and management experience. Other requirements include valid Special Education credential in Montana; advanced degree; technologically proficient with experience in online IEP tools; excellent communication skills, both oral and written, management experience; and occasional travel.

Manager of Counseling

Minimum Professional Qualifications and/or Experience: Qualifications include a minimum of 5 years counseling or teaching experience; management experience preferred; Montana professional school counselor certification; minimum of a master's degree in school counseling; advanced degree required; technologically proficient; excellent communication skills, both oral and written; and occasional travel.

Administrative Assistants

Minimum Professional Qualifications and/or Experience: Qualifications will include administrative experience; strong technology skills; excellent communication skills, both oral and written; and being highly organized and punctual.

Testing Coordinator

Minimum Professional Qualifications and/or Experience: Experience with state testing; strong technology skills; excellent communication skills, both oral and written; high attention to detail; ability to manage competing priorities; and being highly organized. The Testing Coordinator will be responsible for understanding and following all Montana specific rules and requirements for state testing. This individual serves as the main point of contact managing and supporting all key operational areas of testing to guide and train stakeholders in understanding and meeting testing requirements.

Professional Development & Training

MTCA staff will benefit from ongoing and effective professional growth. The training begins with an initial teacher orientation and several days of pre-service training. Teachers will build a strong foundation for teaching in the online environment with student success as a focus. Professional Learning

Communities (PLC), nationally facilitated professional learning sessions, and weekly updates will keep teachers up to date and on the road to being experts in online learning. Research on effective professional development indicates that professional development must be intensive, ongoing, and connected to practice. Teachers need to try out new ideas and strategies with their students and to reflect on the results of these strategies. Intensive monthly professional development, especially when it includes application of knowledge to planning and instruction, has a greater chance of influencing teaching practices, and in turn, leading to gains in student learning. Teachers will take part in ongoing professional development activities throughout the school year.

Teachers will participate in synchronous and asynchronous professional learning on topics such as:

- The Dynamic Classroom, The Dynamic Classroom Instructional Model, and the role of the Dynamic Classroom Teacher,
- Implementing specific research-based instructional strategies,
- Using effective teaching practices and communication skills for an online environment,
- Utilizing the state and national standards to inform instruction,
- Using technology to engage students in collaborative learning activities, and
- Using data to guide instruction.

Topics for trainings will be selected based on school goals, student performance data, student needs, national initiatives in education, and research-based best practices. Professional learning sessions will include an evaluation survey to elicit teacher and administrator feedback. Professional learning will be:

- Intensive – Participants will identify the purpose of educational practices and examine how they can be implemented in the online environment. Participants will collaboratively discuss strategies that can be implemented with students.
- Ongoing – New instructional strategies and the latest learning science 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. Further discussion and exploration at the school level will strengthen these connections.
- Connected to Practice – Following each session, participants will apply what they have learned to their professional practice. They will integrate precise, targeted strategies into their planning and instruction, and reflect on the outcomes through the Teacher ePortfolio data view, a virtual portfolio which allows them to document their attendance and upload resources related to their professional learning.

Teaching in an online environment offers flexibility and allows for a greater level of professional learning throughout the school year. Although designated professional development days will have a specific focus, additional professional learning support will be available daily. Teachers will have multiple opportunities for seeking assistance and support with instructional strategies for engaging students and families, making decisions based on data, and completing school year cycle tasks in a timely and efficient manner. The School will receive multiple levels of support from Pearson to implement professional development that meets the needs of the teachers and the School.

Teachers will be instructed on how to modify a course through new teacher orientation. Intensive training for teachers and other school staff prior to and throughout the school year will be provided. At the beginning of the year, training sessions focus on the “how to” — the basic tools and skills that teachers need to know and understand to teach in an online environment, navigate the EMS (e.g., how to access the Grade Book, how to customize an assignment), and complete the tasks associated with the school year cycle of activities. Before the start of each school year, all teachers will complete the Teacher Orientation Course: Foundations of Instruction. This course will be delivered through the EMS, and contains lessons, assessments, and links to online tutorials. This introductory course supports teachers in transitioning from a brick-and-mortar school to an online school and covers curriculum, assessment, personalizing instruction, school year events, grading, communication, and essential tools in the EMS to monitor and support student learning. Upon successful completion of these courses and assessments, teachers will be ready to begin instruction. Teachers are expected to earn a grade of 80% or higher in this course.

Additional Professional Development Resources

During the school year, ongoing professional development sessions will also be offered based on teacher feedback from surveys completed after professional learning sessions, student needs, and other priorities as identified by the School Leader and leadership team at the School. In addition, these resources will be available to all school staff to support their professional learning.

- **Teacher Orientation:** Teacher Orientation is a resource for teachers and school personnel to use all year. It contains policies, procedures, and “how to” components that aid the teachers on a day-to-day basis. These “how to” components have accompanying on-line tutorial segments that visually demonstrate each process.
- **Virtual Library:** The Virtual Library is a website that is easy to navigate and serves as a one stop shop for teachers and staff to find guidance on instructional practices, professional learning, and training resources. Each section contains links to resources to support teacher effectiveness, best practices, and tools designed to personalize the learning experience for students.
- **Weekly Newsletters:** All teachers will receive a weekly electronic newsletter that highlights improvements to the curriculum and the EMS, teacher tasks associated with the School Year Cycle, new procedures, shared tips, and community-building activities. Additional training in health and safety areas may be included as needed to comply with the School’s health and safety policies and/or with state law.
- **The Dynamic Classroom Course for Educators:** This online resource will allow teachers to understand the connection between the curriculum and best practices that the Dynamic Classroom Teacher uses to bring the asynchronous curriculum to life. It will provide teacher examples to illustrate the instructional practices linked to the curriculum.
- **Professional Learning Facilitators:** The School will work with a designated Pearson Professional Learning Facilitator to identify teacher professional development and training needs and ensure that teachers have access to ongoing learning opportunities.
- **Professional Learning Hub:** This location on the platform houses the Professional Learning calendar and provides access to asynchronous professional learning offerings.

14. Describe the proposed leadership and teacher employment policies, including performance evaluation plans.

14.a Leadership & Teacher Employment Policies

The principles of equal employment opportunity are vital to the School's success and extend to all aspects of employment, including recruitment, hiring, assignment, training, compensation, benefits, terminations, educational assistance, social and recreational programs, promotions, and transfers. MTCA is committed to creating and fostering a work environment free from unlawful discrimination and harassment and one in which decisions and terms of employment are not based in any way on race, creed, color, religion or religious affiliation, national origin, citizenship, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity and/or expression, marital status, disability, genetic information, or veteran status, or any other category protected by state or federal law.

Continued success in equal employment opportunity depends not only on the commitment and involvement of those directly responsible for staffing the School but also on the dedication of all staff members. All staff are charged with making a personal commitment to practice and enforce the principles of this policy.

Additionally, a manager who has a personal or professional relationship with an applicant for employment must disclose this relationship in writing at the outset of the hiring process. In order to maintain objectivity in hiring decisions, it may be necessary for the manager to be excused from the interview process.

MTCA will offer a work environment that provides opportunities for each employee to maximize their potential and meet the highest performance standards. The School will offer competitive compensation with annual performance and salary reviews as well as routine market research and alignment studies. Salary offers will be determined based on key qualifications of the candidate including degree, experience, and content area. In addition, employees will have access to a competitive and comprehensive benefits package, including multiple options for health benefit plans -medical, dental, and vision. In addition, employees will have the opportunity to take advantage of a variety of employer provided benefits including tuition assistance, adoption assistance, a confidential employee assistance program, short & long-term disability, 401(k) match, life insurance and accident insurance, as well as other voluntary benefits.

Employees will receive annual paid time off which increases with their tenure to include holidays, vacation, and sick leave, as well as additional forms of leave such as bereavement leave, bonding, serious illness in the family, and jury duty leave, as needed.

14.b Performance Evaluation Plans

MTCA will adopt a standards-based evaluation system designed to encourage professional learning through a continuum of career development to ensure student success and meet school goals. This evaluation system will be reviewed and approved by the Park City Schools Board. The frameworks used will include nationally recognized tools, modified to fit the online learning environment, while also aligning to the Montana Educator Performance Appraisal System (Montana-EPAS). MTCA's evaluation process will include formative and summative measures that lead to continuous improvement, are aligned to state standards that reflect excellence, foster a culture of professional growth that informs practice and promotes learning, and are based on multiple, balanced measures that are fair and ethical.

The following process demonstrates that Park City Schools Board has the capacity to ensure that all staff, including the School Leader's performance, will be evaluated on a consistent and regular basis.

Evaluation Process for Teachers

Teachers will be evaluated on an annual basis which will include formative and summative measures based on the three core concepts: professional growth, continuous improvement, and quality assurance. Competencies for teachers will be evaluated in the context of the School's goals, which evaluate student growth and achievement metrics, and observations of an employee's proficiency within each competency. Teachers will be evaluated using various methods, including parent and student feedback, observations of lessons and interactions, and review of relevant documentation and data. Student achievement metrics will be incorporated in the evaluation process and may include the following: parent feedback, supervisor observations, assessment results, school assessment results, and/or student participation/completion.

Teachers will receive periodic feedback both formally and informally from their manager throughout the school year, via the Human Resources Information System's Performance Management module. Teachers can document their own achievements in the Performance Management module for consideration during their evaluation.

The evaluator will assign an overall summative evaluation rating of *Unsatisfactory*, *Developing*, *Proficient*, or *Exemplary* or based on the combination of ratings on each domain. Each domain will be weighted in accordance with state requirements in developing the overall rating. A Teacher's summative rating will have an impact on future decisions regarding retention, promotional opportunities, or disciplinary action and termination decisions.

Evaluation Process for Administrators

School administrators will be evaluated annually using locally developed tools that align to Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL) formerly known as the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standards (2008). These standards are centered on empowering every learner to take ownership of their learning, emphasize the learning of content, application of knowledge and skill to real world problems, value the differences each learner brings to the learning experience, and maximize learning by leveraging rapidly changing learning environments.

Like teachers, the School Administrator evaluation will be structured by the three core concepts: professional growth, continuous improvement, and quality assurance. Indicators of effectiveness will include leadership and professionalism, school climate, achievement of school's goals and overall progress of the School.

The evaluator will assign an overall summative evaluation rating of *Does not Meet Expectations*, *Meets Expectations* or *Exceeds Expectations* based on the combination of ratings on each domain. Each domain will be weighted in accordance with state requirements in developing the overall rating. An Administrator's summative rating will have an impact on decisions regarding retention, promotional opportunities, or disciplinary action and termination decisions.

Figure 16. Process and Timeline for the Evaluation Process



1. Annual Evaluation Overview & Training

School Leader meets with staff to review the evaluation process, timeline, and tools at the start of the school year.

2. Goal-Setting Process

Evaluator and employee meet to discuss employee goals. Goals are structured to help the School achieve its goals, to help the employee expand his/her relevant skills/abilities, and to foster the academic success of students.

3. Observation 1

Observer meets with the employee on an ongoing basis for professional dialog and support in the areas of goal(s) progression and performance.

4. Mid-Year Formative Assessment

Evaluators meet with all employees to discuss the employee’s performance. The evaluator provides the employee with constructive feedback related to his/her strengths, weaknesses, and targeted areas for growth. The evaluation is a review of personal goals, school goals, and position-specific competencies. The formative assessment includes the evaluator’s ratings of the educator’s performance in each domain and assigns an overall rating.

5. Observation 2

Observer meets with the employee on an ongoing basis for professional dialog and support in the areas of goal(s) progression, performance, and targeted areas for growth identified on the mid-year performance review.

6. End-Of-Year Summative Evaluation

Evaluator and employee discuss employee's performance. The employee completes a self-assessment and submits evidence/portfolio documenting performance outcomes. The evaluator provides the employee with constructive feedback related to his/her strengths, weaknesses, and targeted areas for growth, school wide goals, and position specific competencies along with input from students, parents/guardians of students. The summative evaluation includes the evaluator's ratings of the educator's performance in each domain and an overall rating.

Training/Professional Development

At the beginning of the school year, all staff will receive training on MTCA's evaluation cycle and criteria used in measuring educator effectiveness, as well as, the goal-setting process, and timeline. Evaluators and observers will receive additional training specific to their role. Additional professional development will be provided as needed or pursuant to authorizer requirements or state law.

15. State the proposed governing bylaws.

15. Governing Bylaws

The Park City School District policies and bylaws are included in Appendix B. The Advisory Board Structure is included in Appendix C.

Plan for Succession

Please see Appendix B for the specific language related to succession, also copied below.

Resignation and Other Vacancies

A Trustee position becomes vacant before the expiration of a term, when any of the following occurs:

1. Death of the incumbent;
2. Resignation, in writing, filed with the Clerk;
3. Incumbent moves out of the district, establishing residence elsewhere;
4. Incumbent is no longer a registered elector of the District under the provisions of §20-20- 301, MCA;
5. Incumbent is absent from the District for sixty (60) consecutive days;
6. Incumbent fails to attend three (3) consecutive meetings of the trustees without good reason;
7. Incumbent has been removed under the provisions of § 20-3-310, MCA; or
8. Incumbent ceases to have the capacity to hold office under any other provision of law.

A Trustee position also shall be vacant when an elected candidate fails to qualify.

When a Trustee vacancy occurs, the remaining trustees shall declare such position vacant and fill such vacancy by appointment. The Board will receive applications from any qualified persons seeking to fill the position after such notices as determined by the board to be appropriate. The Board will appoint one (1) candidate to fill the position. Should the Board fail to fill a vacancy within sixty (60) days from the creation of a vacancy, the county superintendent shall appoint, in writing, a competent person to fill such vacancy. An appointee shall qualify by completing and filing an oath of office with the county superintendent within fifteen (15) days after receiving notice of the appointment and shall serve until the next regularly scheduled school election and a successor has qualified.

Resignation of a Trustee, for whatever reason, must be submitted in writing to the Clerk. A resignation is effective seventy-two (72) hours after its submission unless withdrawn during that period by the register

through written notification of withdrawal made to the Clerk. The Board will ratify the resignation at its next regularly scheduled meeting and will proceed to fill the vacancy as provided by statute and Board policy.

Legal References: § 2-16-502, MCA Registrations
 § 20-3-308, MCA Vacancy of trustee position
 § 20-3-309, MCA Filling vacated trustee position – appointee qualification and term of office

16. Explain any partnerships or contractual relationships central to the operations and mission of the public charter school.

16. Key Partnerships & Contractual Relationships

The Board plans to form a key partnership with Pearson that is central to the operations and mission of the School. Pearson brings not only expertise in a comprehensive suite of services but also unique college and career readiness courses and resources that directly enable the School to meet its mission. This partnership will enable the Board to focus on governance and oversight to ensure the School is fulfilling its mission and intended educational program while also holding Pearson accountable for delivering contracted services.

By virtue of its work over the past 21 years, Pearson has helped create the field that is now known as K-12 online learning. When the first Connections Academy school began, fewer than 1,000 students were enrolled in full-time online education around the U.S., and fewer than 100,000 were taking supplementary online courses. Today, the total number of full-time online students is estimated to be more than 300,000 and over three million students take supplementary online courses.²⁷ Through collaborative efforts with thought-leader organizations such as the Aurora Institute and Digital Learning Collaborative, Pearson has played a key role in catalyzing this growth while working diligently to provide access to online educational opportunities that are consistently high-quality, highly accountable, and characterized by continuous improvement. Pearson has aimed to be a pioneer, advocating for a new paradigm of K-12 education where the focus is on schooling, not schools; academic results, not inputs and processes; and achievement, not seat time.

Pearson has been a purpose-driven organization even prior to the opening of the first Connections Academy school in 2002.²⁸ Connections Academy schools share a culture of high expectations, ethical practices, and continuous improvement. Since the beginning of the Connections Academy model, the focus has been on creating a new kind of school that provides each student with personalized performance learning to maximize their potential. The development of the curriculum and platform, the creation of teaching protocols, the thoughtful addition of schools to the network, and outreach to students have all been guided by this purpose. Pearson’s mission is to help each student maximize their potential and meet the highest performance standards through a uniquely individualized learning program. The Board also recognizes that this uniquely individualized online learning environment may only be needed for some students for a particular period of time. For example, online learning may be needed while a student undergoes medical treatment for a year or for safety reasons during middle school. The approach to this unique online model is tailored for students of all abilities—preparing

²⁷ Source: National Center for Education Statistics:
https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/tables/201314_Virtual_Schools_table_3.asp

²⁸ Source: Company Timeline, https://www.connectionsacademy.com/_public/features/10th-Anniversary-

students to succeed in school, and in life.

Pearson has been recognized for its achievements. In the 2022 EdTech Digest Awards, Pearson was named a Finalist in the category of “e-learning, blended, flipped solution or remote solution” in the “Cool Tools” Awards. Pearson was also honored as a finalist in the category of “EdTech Company Setting a Trend” of the “EdTech Trendsetter” Award. Pearson was named a Tech & Learning Winner: 2021 Best Remote & Blended Learning Tools for Primary (K-6) and Secondary (6-12).²⁹ Tech & Learning judges deemed Connections Academy schools as a standout for helping students, parents, and teachers succeed in new learning environments. In the 2022-23 survey conducted by Shapiro + Raj (an independent market research company), 95% of parents agree the Connections Academy curriculum is high quality, 96% of parents were satisfied with the program, and 97% of parents were satisfied with the helpfulness of their child’s Connections Academy teacher.³⁰ Lastly, recent research from an independent study conducted on Connections Academy schools shows that there is no statistical difference in the performance of students in online schools on state math and reading tests and the performance of students in brick-and-mortar schools when matched for student mobility and other demographic data.³¹

Today Pearson supports 47 online schools and over 100,000 full-time students across the country and in the Northwest. Pearson is excited about the opportunity to support the Board to provide students and families with the educational options they need to succeed in Montana. Pearson has a proven record of success in collaborating with public online schools, consistent strong ratings from parents, proven acceptance of students to highly regarded colleges and universities, positive relationships with strong governing boards, and passionate testimonials from families about their successful experiences. MTCA plans to use Pearson’s curriculum as well as support in the areas of staffing, special education, performance management, facilities management, professional learning, start-up plans, enrollment, technology, and other areas that will be outlined in an agreement with our proposed provider upon charter approval. The decision for these services was based upon Pearson’s reputation, 21 years of experience, and academic results. The Board is confident that partnering with Pearson’s Connections Academy is the best option for MTCA and students/parents in Montana.

With the exceptions of third-party professional services such as legal and auditing services, Pearson offers a turn-key solution to MTCA and no additional contracted services have been incorporated into the budget.

A Responsibly Structured Partnership

Upon approval of the application, the Board will use a carefully structured and highly detailed agreement with the proposed service provider that outlines expectations and the specific services that Pearson will provide to ensure strong mutual understanding of the mutual roles and responsibilities. The Board will evaluate Pearson annually on the services included in its contract, including but not limited to accurate enrollment reporting, independent financial and operational audit reports, staff feedback on training, development, technology and curriculum, and overall organizational health. In addition, the Board will evaluate annual parent satisfaction survey results which include a five-point scale on the EMS, technology, operations, and teacher effectiveness to determine the quality of the provider.

²⁹ Source: <https://www.techlearning.com/news/tech-and-learning-names-the-winners-of-the-2021-best-remote-and-blended-learning-tools>

³⁰ Source: <https://www.connectionsacademy.com/>

³¹ Gatti, G. (2018). A comparison study of Connections Academy Schools to matched brick and mortar and virtual schools, examining the types of students who attend K–12 virtual school and the effects on performance of a highly mobile student body. Efficacy & Research Report. London: Pearson.

While Pearson will assist with curriculum, technology, and other support services in compliance with Montana law, the Board will maintain responsibility for ensuring MTCA meets all educational, fiscal, and programmatic goals outlined in the charter. Although the Board could contract with other providers, the efficiency and integration of services are critical to ensure that the School focuses their most important resources (people and time) on academics and not day-to-day operational issues for a statewide online school. MTCA is committed to providing the best for students and families.

17. Provide the proposed calendar and sample daily schedule.

17.a School Calendar

Students will meet all regulatory requirements for attending public school in the state, including a minimum of 180 instructional days.

MTCA Weekly Attendance Requirements:

- MTCA students in Grade K will receive 20 hours of instruction per week.
- MTCA students in Grades 1-5 will receive 25 hours of instruction per week.
- MTCA students in Grades 6-12 will receive 30 hours of instruction per week.
- As an online school, students do not have scheduled lunch or recess breaks within the virtual learning schedule but should build these into their individual learning schedules in the home setting. Lunch and/or recess breaks do not impact MTCA's attendance requirements.

All attendance requirements will be documented in the School Handbook. The School's documents explaining attendance requirements will emphasize the value and importance of school attendance without over-reliance on punitive measures for non-attendance (see Appendix E, School Handbook, Section 4, Attendance). Hours of schooling per day and/or week will be accumulated by completing lessons, assessments, portfolio items, labs, attending direct instruction sessions, attending educational field trips, participating in state-mandated assessments, and by participating in other educational activities. Failure to attend mandated LiveLesson sessions, state testing, or respond to messages and phone calls from teachers may be counted against documented attendance hours.

To maximize student learning, regular attendance is imperative. The program offers a great deal of flexibility about how many hours students spend each day on schoolwork and on what days of the week they complete that work. Due to this flexibility, the School will have zero tolerance for truancy. Caretakers will be held legally responsible for ensuring that their students are fully participating in school, even if they have designated another individual as their student's Learning Coach.

MTCA's school schedule for the 2024-25 school year will be as shown in the following graphic.

2024-2025

August '24						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

September '24						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30					

October '24						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31		

November '24						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30

December '24						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

January '25						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

February '25						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	

March '25						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31					

April '25						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30			

May '25						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

June '25						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30					

Calendar of Events

8/14	First Day of School (Teachers)
8/20	First Day of School (Students)
9/2	Labor Day
10/17-10/18	Professional Development Day
11/27-11/29	Thanksgiving Break
12/23-1/1	Winter Break
1/10	First Semester End Date
1/13	Professional Development Day
1/14	Second Semester Start Date
1/20	Martin Luther King, Jr. Day
2/17	President's Day
3/24-3/28	Spring Break
4/7	Professional Development Day
5/26	Memorial Day
5/30	Last Day of School (Students)
6/6	Last Day of School (Teachers)

Legend

 	No School
 	Staff Work Day
 	Semester Start/End Dates
Semester Dates	
S1	08/20/24 - 01/10/25 90 Days
S2	01/14/25 - 05/30/25 90 Days
Total School Days: 180	



Montana Connections Academy School Calendar

Note: The School Status Legend below the calendar reflects the possible school statuses for each event. All events that show a status of School In Session indicates they are school days for students. All events which show any other status indicates they are NOT school days for students. Please refer to the legend to determine whether teachers and/or administrator staff are available for each event according to its status.

Event	School Status	Date
<i>First Day of School</i>	School and Office Open	August 20, 2024
Labor Day	School and Office Closed	September 2, 2024
Professional Development Day	Staff Work Day	October 17-18, 2024
Thanksgiving Break	School and Office Closed	November 27-29, 2024
Winter Break	School and Office Closed	December 23, 2024 - January 1, 2025
<i>First Semester End Date</i>	NA	January 10, 2025
Professional Development Day	Staff Work Day	January 13, 2025
<i>Second Semester Start Date</i>	NA	January 14, 2025
Martin Luther King, Jr. Day	School and Office Closed	January 20, 2025
Presidents' Day	School Closed/Office Open	February 17, 2025
Spring Break	School Closed/Office Open	March 24, 2025
	School and Office Closed	March 25-28, 2025
Professional Development Day	Staff Work Day	April 7, 2025
Memorial Day	School and Office Closed	May 26, 2025
<i>Last Day of School</i>	School and Office Open	May 30, 2025
School Closed - Additional Administrator/12 Month Employee Days:		
November 27, 2024; December 23, 2024; December 24, 2024; March 25-28, 2025		

School Status Legend:

School Closed/Office Open = Students and Teachers are not in school, but Administrators are on duty.

School and Office Closed = No one is in school.

School and Office Open = Everyone is in school.

Staff Work Day = Students are not in school, but Administrators and Teachers are on duty.

17.b Sample Daily Schedules

Sample daily schedules are shown below. In addition, the pages that follow show sample weekly course schedules for elementary, middle school, and high school students.

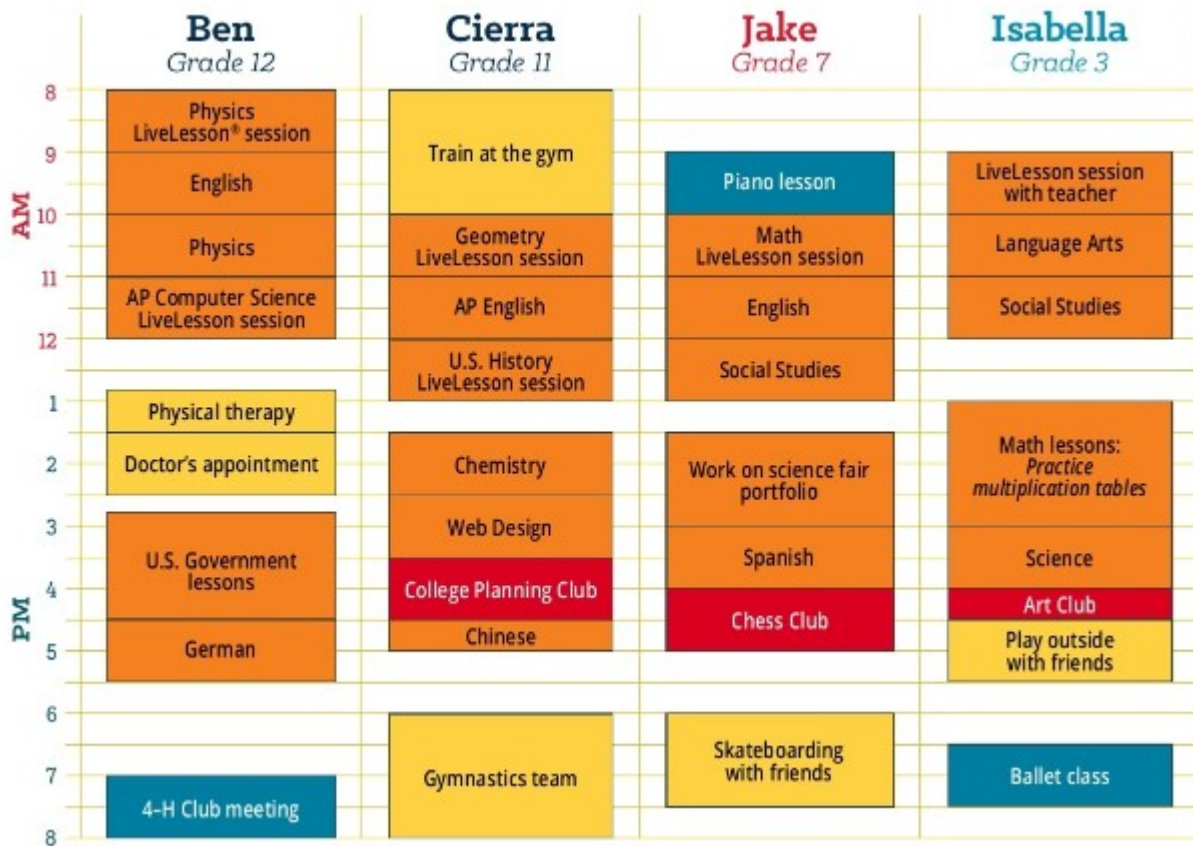


Figure 17. Daily schedules ensure adequate instructional time.



Sample Weekly Course Schedule for an Elementary School Student

















9/3/2022				
Mon, 29	Tue, 30	Wed, 31	Thu, 1	Fri, 2
Art 2 - What Can You Do with a Line? 	Language Arts 2 A - I See It Differently: Speak/Listen 	Language Arts 2 A - I See It Differently: Fluency 	Language Arts 2 A - I See It Differently: Synthesize 	Educational Technology and Online Learning 2 - Diagrams sh and th (2)
Language Arts 2 A - I See It Differently: Comprehension 	Math 2 A - Make a 10 to Add 	Math 2 A - Addition Fact Patterns 	Math 2 A - Count on and Count Back to Subtract 	Language Arts 2 A - Knowing What's Important: Genre
Math 2 A - Doubles and Near Doubles 	Science 2 A - Plants Make New Plants 	Physical Education 2 - Introduction to Physical Education 2	Science 2 A - How Plants Are Alike and Different 	Math 2 A - Think Addition to Subtract
Social Studies 2 A - We Are Good Citizens Day 1 	Social Studies 2 A - We Are Good Citizens Day 2 	Social Studies 2 A - Reading Skills: Draw Conclusions 		Science 2 A - Unit Review
				Social Studies 2 A - Our Rights as Citizens Day 1

Sample Weekly Course Schedule for a Middle School Student

Mon, 12	Tue, 13	Wed, 14	Thu, 15	Fri, 16
Language Arts 6 A - Attention to Detail 	Educational Technology and Online Learning 7 - File Management and Organization 	Language Arts 6 A - Identifying Central Ideas 	Educational Technology and Online Learning 7 - Computer Troubleshooting 	Language Arts 6 A - Author's Purpose
Language Arts 6 B - Portfolio: Argument Essay II 	Language Arts 6 A - Explicit Details and Inferences 	Language Arts 6 B - Argumentative Essay: Apply 	Language Arts 6 A - Effective Summaries 	Language Arts 6 B - Argumentative Essay Unit Test
Math 7 B - Solutions to Real-World Inequality Problems 	Language Arts 6 B - Portfolio: Argument Essay III 	Math 7 A - Applications of Subtracting Rational Numbers 	Language Arts 6 B - Argumentative Essay Review 	Math 7 A - Add & Subtract Rational Numbers Apply
Science 6 A - Eclipses 	Math 7 A - Subtract Fractions & Decimals 	Math 7 B - Inequality Problems Discussion 	Math 7 A - Opposites Make Zero 	Math 7 B - Inequalities Review
Science 6 B - Air Masses 	Math 7 B - Inequality Problems Discussion 	Science 6 A - Not Enough Hours	Math 7 B - Inequalities Apply 	
Social Studies 7 A - Civics, Politics, and Government (2) 	Science 6 A - Reason for the Seasons 	Science 6 B - Predicting Weather 	Science 6 A - Asteroid Impact Portfolio 1	
Social Studies 7 B - Economic Decision Making (2) 	Science 6 B - Air Mass Interactions 	Social Studies 7 A - Constitutions and Government (2) 	Science 6 B - Many Things Affect Weather 	
	Social Studies 7 A - Constitutions and Government (2) 	Social Studies 7 B - Distributing Goods and Services (2) 	Social Studies 7 A - American Political Identity (2) 	
	Social Studies 7 B - Distributing Goods and Services (2) 		Social Studies 7 B - Incentives (2) 	

Sample Weekly Course Schedule for a High School Student

- 9/3/2022

Mon, 29	Tue, 30	Wed, 31	Thu, 1	Fri, 2
Algebra 1 A - Working with Sets (2) 	Algebra 1 A - Working with Sets (2) 	Algebra 1 A - Compound Inequalities 	Algebra 1 A - Absolute Value Equations and Inequalities (2) 	Algebra 1 A - Absolute Value Equations and Inequalities (2) 
German I A - Lektion 17 	Environmental Science A - Population versus Community (2) 	German I A - Lektion 2	Environmental Science A - Population versus Community (2)	German I A - Lektion 4 
Physical Education - Basketball Skills Progression (2) 	German I A - Lektion 1	World History A - Unit Review and Test (2) 	German I A - Lektion 3	Health, Fitness, and Nutrition A - Understanding Flexibility
World History A - The Legacy of Rome 	Health, Fitness, and Nutrition A - Understanding How Joints 		World History A - Unit Review and Test (2) 	Physical Education - Basketball Rules, Positions, and Current Events 
	World History A - The Origins of Christianity 			World History A - The Early Middle Ages 

BUSINESS OPERATIONS

18. Describe plans for providing transportation, food service, and all other significant operational or ancillary services.

18. Transportation, Food Service & Ancillary Services

As an online school that students attend from home or other locations, MTCA does not plan to provide general school transportation, food service, or other ancillary services traditionally provided by brick-and-mortar schools. However, the School does plan to provide computer technology and Internet subsidy to FARM students upon request. The budget assumes these services will be delivered to FARM-eligible households, using the state-wide average rate of 39%. Internet and computer access provides virtual “transportation” to and from the school.

Services for students with disabilities will be equally accessible to all students in Montana. As determined by the IEP team, students may receive these services in a virtual setting and/or face-to-face. Services may be provided face-to-face at the providers’ locations, via computer, in homes, community sites, and medical offices. Decisions as to the location of service delivery will be made during the IEP team meeting with input from the parents of the student.

When the IEP team determines that the services will be provided face-to-face, the services will be provided at a mutually convenient location for both the family and the provider. Potential options for locations include the student’s home, the therapist’s business location, libraries, community centers, and so forth. For services provided outside of the home, special transportation will be provided or the parent may choose to receive mileage reimbursement for transporting their child. MTCA will provide related services by engaging, private businesses, agencies, hospitals, adult service providers, and any other acceptable providers. For each provider serving enrolled students, MTCA will maintain copies of licensure and certification, background checks, etc. consistent with Montana law.

For any required in-person state testing, the School will set up in-person, proctored locations throughout the state, based on the geographic locations of the student population. Geographic population maps will be created to identify areas where testing sites are needed based on student population. Sites will be reviewed annually to adjust for an increase in student population. Students will be assigned to a testing center. If a family has transportation issues and is not able to make it to a testing site, the School will work with the family to make accommodations and may help with travel.

19. Describe cocurricular and extracurricular programs and how the programs will be funded and delivered.

19. Co-curricular and Extracurricular Programs

Clubs and Activities

MTCA will offer students access to student-to-student interactions through a Global Clubs and Activities program. As an integral part of MTCA’s proposed academic program, students will be offered access to a wide range of nationally facilitated virtual clubs and special events throughout the school year. Clubs are co-curricular and teacher facilitated. Clubs and activities are facilitated by local school staff, national school staff, or other certified staff depending upon the club. Participation in these online clubs and activities enhances students’ feeling of connectedness, provides socialization opportunities, and improves academic achievement and school retention rates. All clubs and activities are non-credit and have no impact on student grades. Clubs require caretaker sign-ups and last throughout most of the

school year. Single-occurrence Pop Up Events that range in subject matter with no sign-up required are offered about ten times a month from October to May.

The following provides a sampling* of some of the clubs the School plans to offer during the 2024-25 school year, though specific clubs do change from school year to school year based on analyzing student interest and feedback:

- Art Club is designed to spark a student's creativity by exploring two-dimensional and three-dimensional art, photography, and graphic design through techniques and styles associated with each medium. Students have the opportunity to create original designs and artwork, share their artwork with peers, learn about appropriate critique guidelines, and provide feedback to other club members. (Grades: 6-12)
- Arts and Crafts encourages students to create crafts using materials found at home and in nature. Through the topics of culture, science, and math, students work on projects from the course as well as monthly special craft challenges. (Grades: K-5)
- Chess Clubs: Introduction and Advanced members learn, socialize, and play in an atmosphere of friendly competition using an exclusive gaming site. After completing a tutorial, students are matched with competitors of the same skill level, and the online games begin. There are also monthly presentations by a Grandmaster in the advanced club, and an end-of-year tournament for all skill levels. (Grades: K-12)
- Conversation Corner is new for the 2022-23 school year; this club is a supportive community for students with diverse learning styles and speaking proficiencies. Students form an inclusive, safe, structured environment for all learners and beautiful brains to communicate on microphone during live sessions and discussion areas. Connections are made through shared experiences, facilitated by speech language pathologists. (Grades: 6-12)
- Debate Club members learn best practices and put them into practice during LiveLesson sessions. Members learn the art of public speaking and critical thinking while working in collaborative teams. Research, reasoning, and understanding opposing perspectives form the foundation for real time debates. (Grades: 6-12)
- Drama Club members participate in several aspects of theater, including history, performance, stage management, and different themes. Students can share their activities from the club course and participate in acting exercises during biweekly LiveLesson sessions. Students can also collaborate on the Message Boards to create projects and perform together.
- E-sports Team members participate in monthly LiveLesson sessions to enjoy interactive lessons in the surprising history, impressive present, and exciting future of E-sports. Students will also have the opportunity to get involved in E-sports League tournaments throughout the year where featured games are Rocket League (6-12), and Valorant (9-12 with caretaker approval), in addition to learning about marketing, shoutcasting, and other roles related to E-sports. Members are not required to play the game. (Grades: 6-8 & 9-12)
- Gaming and Technology Clubs allow students who have an affinity for technology and gaming to explore and discuss gaming styles and genres, careers in the gaming and technology industry, and share their original work in LiveLesson sessions. Individual and collaborative projects may include creating elements of video games and investigating Internet safety and online threats. (Grades: K-5, & 6-12)

- Global Trek members are immersed in tips for traveling to all the continents of the world, including the culture and geography of different countries. Students can share their activities from the club course during biweekly LiveLesson sessions, and they can also collaborate on the Message Boards to discuss traveling and opening their world to new experiences and cultures. (Grades: 6-12)
- Kindness Club members inspire each other to build up online students from around the country and world, and complete regular challenges to scatter kindness throughout their communities. (Grades: K-5)
- Leadership Club members learn valuable leadership skills through monthly LiveLesson sessions. They also put their new skills to good use through special opportunities as student leaders. Students who complete enough activities can earn a Leadership Certificate. (Grades 6-12)
- Movement Club is for students who want to get a workout in between classes and after completing their schoolwork. Students explore and share different techniques to promote movement through an active Message Board and LiveLesson sessions. (Grades: K-12)
- Science Sleuths members put on their raincoats and investigate weather's wild side, with a focus on the weirder side of science by following along with fun, hands-on activities from the club course that will leave them scratching their heads! Club members can also collaborate through discussions and sharing experiment results on the message boards. (Grades: K-5)
- Writers' Oasis provides a virtual environment where students can work collaboratively and individually to write original stories and poetry in all genres of fiction and non-fiction, and publish work on *The Monitor* blog. Students will be provided the opportunity to share their writing and favorite books during LiveLesson sessions. Students can use the Message Boards to offer insight on student writing samples, create collaborative stories, and discuss various literary works or authors. (Grades: 6-12)

The following provides a sampling* of some of the Pop Up Events that MTCA plans to offer during the 2024-25 school year, though specific events vary from school year to school year based on analyzing student interest and feedback:

- Amazing Animal Migrations, K-12
- Amazing Machines, K-12
- Back to School Kickoff, K-12
- Bring Your Pet to School, K-12
- Clubs & Activities Pep Rallies, K-12
- Celebrating Language and Culture Series, K-12
- Celebrating Percussion Instruments All Around the World, K-12
- Debt-free Degree, 6-12
- Elementary Storytelling Series, K-5
- Fashion: What Does it Mean to You? K-12
- Glow in the Dark Science: All About Bioluminescence, K-12
- Gross Science, K-12
- Hour of Code, K-12
- May the Fourth Be With You: Star Wars Pop Up, K-12
- Money Smarts, 6-12
- Mysteries of Math, K-12
- Photography Showcase, K-12
- Pride Snack & Chat
- Rescued Animals Virtual Field Trip

- Snack & Chats
- STEAM Pop Ups
- Talent Show
- Virtual Art Field Trip
- What's Cooking?
- Yarn Enthusiasts
- Young Leaders

*Specific club and pop-up offerings are subject to change.

Field Trips

Students and families at MTCA will benefit from educational, face-to-face field trips to provide opportunities for students to interact face to face. School staff members, in coordination with parent volunteers, will facilitate enriching in-person community activities and field trips to round out the comprehensive learning experience. Pending local health conditions and state/local regulations, students will have the opportunity to participate in regular field trips and outings to various regional areas. The School will offer a wide range of field trips. Field trips provide students with additional opportunities to socialize with their peers and are designed to help both students and Learning Coaches connect to their school and to each other. Students may go on trips to museums, farms, science centers, cultural centers, and unique experiential learning opportunities throughout the region. Families may attend and participate in Learning Events with their student and may also suggest potential field trip locations to the School.

Students will have the opportunity to participate in regular field trips and outings facilitated by School staff and Community Coordinators – parent volunteers whom MTCA supports in organizing such activities for families who live nearby. Field trips may include visits to the following (note, this is a sample list only and final field trip locations will be chosen based on geographic locations of students and alignment to academic objectives):

- Glacier National Park
- Museum of the Plains Indians
- The Grizzly and Wolf Discovery Center
- C. M. Russell Museum
- Museum of the Rockies
- World Museum of Mining

The flexibility of MTCA's program allows for extracurricular activities; current students in online schools are participating in Olympic-level sports, professional acting, pageants, and other community-based activities. Students with an IEP or Section 504 Plan will be provided necessary accommodations services to participate in field trips. The school will ensure that opportunities are provided throughout the state to ensure that all students have the ability to attend field trips in their regional area.

20. Describe the proposed financial plan and policies, including financial controls and audit requirements.

20.a Financial Plan & Policies

MTCA will follow a financial and accounting plan that aligns with Park City Schools, is compliant with generally accepted accounting principles (GAAP) and will provide an accurate accounting of all of its finances, ensure sufficient information for audit purposes, and provide data in the format needed for accurate and timely reporting.

The Board will use a sound budgeting and forecasting policy and procedures to monitor revenue and authorize expenditures according to any restrictions placed on such revenue. Developing the annual budget will be an iterative process incorporating input from key stakeholders, including the School Leader, the Advisory Board, and designated members of the Park City School Board. A preliminary budget based on initial assumptions will be presented to the Board and will be approved by the Board before the start of the school year. This budget will then be compared to the actual and forecasted results on a regular basis.

20.b Financial Controls & Audit Requirements

Financial Controls

MTCA will institute rigorous internal financial controls as follows.

- Segregation of Duties: MTCA will develop and maintain simple check request and purchase order forms to document the authorization of non-payroll expenditures.
- All proposed school expenditures must be approved by the School Leader or School Leader designee, who will review the proposed expenditure to determine whether it is consistent with the Board-adopted budget and sign the check request form. All approved check requests and related purchase orders will be provided to the Board designee and will be signed by a Board member or a designee of the Board who has been approved as a signatory on the School's checking account to initiate payment. All transactions will be posted on an electronic general ledger.
- Authorization and Processing of Disbursements: To ensure fiscal responsibility and compliance, the Board will meet regularly to review the operations and financial performance of the School.
- Supporting documentation for all expenditures will be provided. The School will not authorize any payment until it has reviewed such support. The Board will establish fiscal policies covering school expenditures. It will also designate specific check signing authority.
- Safeguard Assets: All state, federal, and other monies received by MTCA will be deposited in its accounts within 24 hours or one banking day of receipt per federal and state regulations. MTCA will acquire all federal, state, and local tax and employer identification numbers to establish as a Montana public charter school as required by law.
- Banking Arrangements/Reconciliation: Park City Schools will set up a bank account for the School at a federally insured commercial bank or credit union. Funds will be deposited in non-speculative accounts including federally insured savings or checking accounts or invested in non-speculative federally backed instruments. For all funds, the Board must appoint and approve all individuals authorized to sign checks in accordance with these policies. All bank accounts will require proper signatures on checks or other forms of disbursement. Bank statements from private banking institutions will be sent directly to the School, who will submit a copy for reconciliation. This reconciliation will be provided to the Treasurer for monthly review.

- Policies and Procedures: Policies and procedures to safeguard payroll and employee information will be implemented by the Board.

Audit Requirements

Financial reports will be reviewed and discussed monthly by the Advisory Board. For additional assurances, the Board may use an external accounting firm to conduct an annual financial audit such as an independent Certified Public Accounting firm selected by the Board in accordance with Governmental Auditing Standards that will meet the specific compliance requirements set forth by Montana regulations or combine with the Board's current auditing process.

MTCA intends to use an industry-standard accounting software to record all of its financial activities. Financial reports will be prepared to provide appropriate insight into the School's finances, improve the decision-making process, speed up response time to financial situations, and create powerful analysis.

The School and the District's financial team, in consultation with Pearson, will work together to create monthly and annual financial reports.

Knowledge & Capacity to Make Difficult Financial Decisions to Operate a Charter School

The Board will be responsible for the overall financial management of the School. The Board is responsible for the oversight and approval of school financial policies and procedures, and its members possess the necessary experience and financial expertise to fulfill its fiscal oversight duties, based on their combined 23 years of experience serving on the Park City School Board. The designated Advisory Board will also provide advice and guidance to the School.

MTCA's financial systems will comply with the Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP) necessary for sound financial management.

Each month, MTCA will produce a set of detailed financial statements that include a statement of activities, a balance sheet, bank reconciliations, invoice detail, payroll registers, any grant fund expenditures, cash receipts from all sources, and a transaction listing of all activity. The Treasurer of the Board and/or Board designee will have access to financial documents for review as an increased measure of oversight and governance. Pearson will review monthly financial statements and support effective decision-making.

A financial report will be shared on a regular basis that will include the current results of the School's financial activities along with a comparison of projected annual costs and the annual approved budget. Budget variances and matters of financial significance will be discussed with the Board and necessary actions and Board approvals will be noted.

The preliminary startup and operating budget are provided in Appendix D. These are carefully aligned to the mission of the School and demonstrate a school with sound financial planning. The five-year budget represents best estimates for revenues and costs for MTCA.

21. Describe the insurance coverage that will be obtained.

21. Insurance Coverage

The School will maintain a comprehensive insurance program in place as dictated by applicable laws and the approved charter. The insurance program will include, but is not limited to Commercial General Liability, Sexual Abuse and Molestation, Educator's Legal Liability, Crime (Employee Dishonesty), Property, and Automobile coverage. The policies will cover the School's operations, extracurricular activities, and volunteer activities. MTCA will be added as a named insured under the existing

comprehensive Pearson Virtual Schools' insurance program in order to take advantage of cost savings due to competitive national package pricing. The cost for such insurance coverage will be included in the schedule of fees the Board will pay Pearson. Pearson will maintain and keep in force the insurance policies and limits no less than such amounts as agreed upon to cover insurable risks associated with operations. Health insurance and workers compensation insurance costs will be included in the benefits fee.

22. Describe the startup and five-year budgets with clearly stated assumptions.

22. Startup & Five-Year Budgets with Assumptions

The preliminary startup and operating budget are carefully aligned to the mission of MTCA and demonstrates a school with sound financial planning where resources are invested in activities that support student learning and families and provide resources to educators. It will leverage the experience and oversight of Park City Schools to ensure sound financial planning and practices. All projected revenue and expenses for the five-year budget demonstrate a focus on students, a conservative approach, and a financially viable school. The budget demonstrates the current vision for the future of the students. However, it also allows flexibility for the Board to react to future needs.

The five-year budget included as Appendix D represents best estimates for revenues and costs for MTCA based upon projections as of October 2023. It is important to note that this budget and associated assumptions will be revised and adjusted based upon actual needs of students and staff, school enrollment fluctuations, funding rates, school priorities, state guidance, and Board revisions. This budget is provided to document the financial viability of the School under reasonably conservative assumptions with a focus on student services. The Board will prepare and approve an annual budget prior to the start of each school year.

The year-by-year enrollment estimates assume an annual increase in student enrollment while considering factors for students leaving the School such as relocation, family life changes, and other changes.

The revenues shown are based on enrollment inputs into the state's Average Number Belonging (ANB) calculator as well as Basic and Per Student Entitlement FY22-23 published rates. The budget assumes MTCA is eligible for all state and categorical funding. MTCA intends to actively pursue grant funding and other funding sources such as Federal Title funds, not included in this budget.

Staff costs assume a student-to-teacher ratio that has been demonstrated to be highly effective in providing personalized instruction in other online schools supported by Pearson across the country. While the School plans to utilize space within Park City Schools in Year 1, facility cost assumptions are included to reflect the potential costs that may be incurred. Additionally, MTCA has budgeted to invest resources in its administrative team to ensure adequate oversight and focus on student services and achievement. The budget assumes that technology and Internet stipends will be provided to households with financial hardship upon request. This includes the use of loaned computers, repairs, warranty, environmentally friendly-certified disposal, and warehousing/logistics services. The cost includes any losses associated with damage caused by the user that is not collectible from the family due to inability to pay.

Startup Budget Assumptions

Revenue	
Start-Up Grant:	Provided by Pearson to cover costs incurred prior to July 1, 2024.
Compensation	
Salary:	Compensation for 3 months prior to 7/1/24 have been included for three key personnel: School Leader, Manager of Special Education, and Manager of Counseling. Base salaries are competitive for a statewide charter school within the Connections Academy portfolio.
Fringe:	Administrator comp includes 24% benefits & 8% employer taxes.
Operating Expenses	
Facilities:	Includes Lease expense associated with the onsite premise as well as copiers, internet, maintenance, repairs, supplies, postage, telephone, small office equipment, and capital outlay for 3 months prior to beginning of fiscal operating year.
Governance:	Includes a modest allocation for board-related expenses and Directors & Officers insurance.
Professional Services:	Includes Legal expenses associated with the inception of the School.
Capital Expenditures	Includes initial expenses to renovate the facility be aligned with the School’s needs. This amount is based on Pearson’s experience with the build-out of a new office for School staff. Most of the expenditures will be expenditures in the first year of operation but a small portion has also been included in the start-up period.
Fund Balance	
Fund Balance:	The Start-Up Grant provided by Pearson covers the foreseen school expenses prior to the beginning fiscal year start date.

Five Year Budget Assumptions

Revenue	
State Revenue:	Evaluated using enrollment inputs into the state’s Average Number Belonging (ANB) calculator as well as Basic and Per Student Entitlement FY22-23 published rates.
Federal Revenue:	While the School will pursue all funding sources, the budget does not include title funds.
E-Rate:	The School will apply for E-Rate in the first year; however, the funds are usually received in the subsequent year, post the receivable period to be accounted as prior year revenue.



Compensation	
Ratios:	Elementary Teachers (K-5) 52 Secondary Teachers (6-12) 39 Special Education Teachers 30 Assistant Principal 1 @ 750 / 1000 Administrative Assistant 400 Advisory/Counseling 300 The overall teacher/student ratio 1:33 assumes 13.4% Special Education Population
Salary:	Merit for both administrators and instructional FTE of 3% is built into all subsequent years. There are no bonuses budgeted.
Fringe:	Both Administrator & Instructional comp include 24% benefits & 8% employer taxes.
Program Fees	
Purchased Services:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pearson will act as the pay agent for the School’s operating expenses. • Pearson’s products and services are allocated based on estimates into the following categories: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student Instructional Materials and Technology including EMS, curriculum, computers to FARM households, and other student direct costs 75.6% • Student Support (Includes Special Ed) 8.7% • Instructional and Staff Support Services 4.0% • Administrative, Business and Other Support 11.2% • Facilities and Other Program Expenses 0.6%
Operating Expenses	
The following categories of operating expenses have been calculated with consistency based upon state-wide online charter experience, and recategorized into the State’s expense classifications.	
Assessments:	Budgeted \$499 per student. Projected based on experience with online schools with similar testing protocols.
Employee Related:	Includes reasonable estimates for expenses such as Recruitment, Background Checks, Professional Development, Team Building, Travel & Conferences.
Facilities:	Includes Lease expense associated with facility estimates using a market rental rate for the onsite premise as well as copiers, internet, maintenance, repairs, supplies, postage, telephone, small office equipment and capital outlay.
Capital Expenditures	Includes initial expenses to renovate the facility to align with the School’s needs. This amount is based on Pearson’s experience with the build-out of a new office for School staff. Most of the expenditures will be expenditures in the first year of operation but a small portion has also been included in the start-up period.
Internet Subsidy:	The budget assumes ISP will be reimbursed to FARM-eligible households upon request, using the state-wide average rate of 39%.



Professional Services:	Includes Legal, Auditing and Other professional services the board wishes to engage.
Student Expenses:	Includes graduation expenses, student activities costs, other curriculum the School may wish to purchase (LiveSpeech, etc.) and outside program expenses (dual enrollment, specialized projects, etc.)
Governance Expense	
Authorizer Oversight:	Includes Park City fee of 3%.

23. Describe the startup and first year cash flow projections with clearly stated assumptions.

23. Startup and First Year Cash Flow Projections and Assumptions

The School expects to incur start-up expenditures around key administrative compensation and facilities costs. Approximately three months prior to the fiscal year, a School Leader, Manager of Special Education, and a Manager of Counseling will be hired. Additionally, the School will begin occupying the facility (i.e., administrative offices) and will incur costs associated with lease expense and small equipment expense.

Further costs associated in both areas, such as public information sessions and technology infrastructure, respectively, are costs included in the School’s agreement with Pearson, and not incurred during the start-up period.

The compensation for three months of the following key staff positions have been included in the startup budget:

School Leader	\$110,000
Manager of Counseling	\$80,000
Manager of Special Education	\$81,000
	\$271,000
3 months early hire	\$67,750

The salaries used here, as well as the 8% effective employee tax rate, are aligned with compensation structured by the other Connections Academy online charter schools. Employee benefits are provided at a rate of 24%.

Facility costs have been analyzed by Pearson’s Facility Workplace Team. The per square footage cost of the facility is aligned to market expectations within the state, as compared to other similar administrative office spaces in Montana. Three months’ rent has been budgeted at \$4,825/month. Operating utilities and internet connectivity have been budgeted in the same manner pending final determination of the facility.

Other immaterial startup expenses such as staff recruitment, supplies etc. have also been budgeted for the startup period. The costs in the budget reflect average start-up expenses for similar school models and are insignificant.

Based upon the budgeted expenditures in the start-up period, Pearson will award MTCA a start-up grant in the amount of \$146,430 costs and expected to provide the School with a small cushion for extra expenses or to begin the first school year.



Beginning with the first year of operations, the School will be able to remain financially sustainable at a much smaller physical footprint even as enrollments fluctuate. Rather than the size of a traditional bricks-and-mortar school, MTCA’s facility will accommodate the administration and some school staff only. Most of the School’s expenses are variable instead of fixed in nature ensuring financial sustainability. For example, Pearson fees are variable and paid based on actual enrollment levels attained by the School. Staffing costs are managed closely, and instructional staff are only hired as students enroll. While the School will release more staffing as more students enroll, there is a minimum number of staff that must be hired before school starts for the School to function. This will ensure that the majority of expenses will flex up and down with enrollment, thus cushioning the impact of lower-than-expected revenue due to an enrollment shortfall. Because the School’s program is fully scalable, fluctuating demographics in the enrolled population, changes in enrollment trends, and enrollment changes in surrounding schools will not strain the School's sustainability. The Board is prepared to make difficult financial decisions to operate the charter school; however, the variable nature of the virtual charter expenses provides a level of flexibility and financial stability since it is based upon enrollment and not fixed expenses.

This flexibility is also enhanced by the School’s agreement with Pearson, which further protects the School’s cash flow. Per the agreement, the School will only pay Pearson once funds become available to the School. The services provided by Pearson allow the School to focus their resources on serving students. Payments and reimbursements to Pearson occur once they are Board approved and cash is available.

The Board is also excited about partnering with Pearson as its service provider with a 21-year record of success. This partnership will allow the School to be flexible and nimble while providing a high-quality online school experience for students regardless of changing demographics, economics, and enrollment changes. Over the past two decades, Pearson has experienced all of these changes, and its partnerships with school districts, state entities, and chartering authorities have flourished.

24. Describe anticipated fundraising contributions and evidence, if applicable.

24. Anticipated Fundraising Contributions & Evidence

The Board does not anticipate relying upon fundraising efforts to generate capital or to supplement the per pupil allocations (PPA). Any required start-up funding will be provided by Pearson and the School will not be required to reimburse Pearson, providing the School with a sound fiscal position from the first day of opening. The Board will focus the School’s greatest level of attention on instructional activities and will evaluate any need to pursue fundraising opportunities in the future.

25. Describe the facilities plan, including backup or contingency plans.

25. Facilities Plan

MTCA will have a physical location that will house the School’s administrative staff only while students will be learning from their homes across the state. MTCA, as part of Park City Schools, will have office space within Park City Schools Administration building. In the future and as the School grows, additional options for increased facility space will be considered on an as-needed basis. In anticipation of future growth, MTCA will explore available office space in Park City as well as possibly unused office space owned by the Park City School Board. Suitable locations will provide opportunities for business and professional services, easy access for the School’s administrative staff and visiting families, on-site

parking, and access to eateries and retail for staff. Centrally located sites that promote opportunities for professional development and interactions with students and their families will be prioritized.

Backup/Contingency Plan

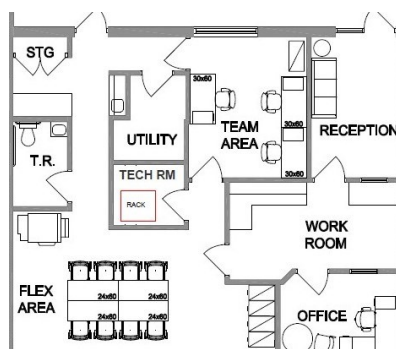
The Board plans to contract with Pearson for identification and management of the School’s physical office space, if no space is available within existing Park City School Board buildings for expansion. The ideal space will include administrative offices and infrastructure for school operations. The school administrative offices will be compliant with all local, state, and federal regulations. The administrative offices will also be in compliance with the necessary building and zoning codes, including health and safety requirements, and accessible to individuals — including staff, parents, and students — with disabilities. Pearson has already completed a preliminary Market Survey of locations, including locations near Park City Schools. The investigation will continue as needed until a suitable location is identified upon approval of the School. Ensuring site inspections and Certificate of Occupancy is part the process of procuring a suitable administrative office space that meets all applicable building codes and health and safety requirements. The initial start-up is to utilize office space within the Park City Schools and explore additional options for a facility meeting the requirements outlined in this application. However, the budget allocated facility expenses utilizing a conservative approach and includes an early identification.

MTCA’s comprehensive facilities support will include site sourcing and selection, lease negotiations, all necessary support and tasks to either directly manage or supervise any necessary construction of the administrative office space and also provide facilities management support once the School opens. Pearson retains a directly employed staff of dedicated corporate real estate professionals supported by best-in-class third-party consultants and vendors across all sub-specialties of commercial real estate to assist with matters such as brokerage, design, construction, and property management.

The facilities support team also includes experienced lease negotiators, including the services of a senior real estate broker affiliated with a leading national real estate brokerage firm as well as support from a specialist real estate attorney. In addition, inputs into lease negotiations are obtained from Pearson’s facility management and construction project management resources for those provisions governing property operations and construction of the office space.

The facilities support team provides lease administration support services as well, including a dedicated team to process and analyze all rent payment requests, processing of landlord notices, and oversight of the various critical dates and associated rights and obligations inherent in a typical office lease between landlord and tenant. Pearson has processes in place to ensure MTCA’s date-driven rights under its lease will be addressed in a timely manner.

Figure 18. Sample Facility Floor Plan



COMMUNITY SUPPORT AND NEED

26. Describe the specific evidence of significant community support.

26. Specific Evidence of Significant Community Support

As a statewide online public charter school, MTCA will seek to form deep relationships with community organizations across the state. The support of community organizations will be essential to the success of the School. The Board has prioritized creating and sustaining partnerships with organizations that complement the School's mission. The Board has received support throughout the state for its educational plan (see Appendix A, Community Support).

- Organic Requests for Information: There were over 800 organic requests for information from families in Montana for information on a Connections Academy school in the last five years, including over 150 in the last year.
- Statements of Support: In addition, MTCA received 82 statements of support from 21 counties across the state during the compressed application timeline. MTCA will continue to develop community connections via its website even after the application is submitted.
- Information Sessions: MTCA also held 13 in-person information sessions across the state to help inform interested students and families about this unique educational model.

The School will continue to take full advantage of valuable community partnerships to ensure that the School reflects the needs and wishes of regional communities. The School will actively seek out community organizations to partner with and provide real connections among students and the community. MTCA has received the support of the Park City School Board. The relationship with Superintendent Grabowska and his leadership team will be instrumental in the long-term success of MTCA as they are expected to form the Advisory Board. Information was provided to educate and inform organizations about MTCA's unique school model and to find opportunities to work together. The Board plans to continue these discussions after the School has been approved and identify specific activities in which students may participate.

Compelling Need for the Proposed Public Charter School

In talking with families at information sessions and in the organic requests for information about a Connections Academy school in Montana, there is a compelling need for the proposed public charter school. MTCA will be an online public charter school and a high-quality, proven educational option for nontraditional students. Through this unique model, MTCA is dedicated to providing a much needed high-quality, full-time virtual option to children that will develop their readiness skills for their future. MTCA will be tailor-made for a diverse array of students who may benefit from a quality option to the traditional brick-and-mortar classroom. MTCA will meet the following needs of Montana families:

- Students with an interest in focusing on their college and career readiness;
- Students whose families seek more involvement in their child's education;
- Students who are medically homebound due to illness or disability;
- Students who are immunocompromised and are concerned about health conditions outside of the home environment;
- Exceptional students who are far ahead of or far behind their peers in school;

- Students pursuing artistic or athletic interests or career development opportunities requiring a flexible schedule;
- Students who require a flexible school schedule;
- Students with special learning needs;
- Students who have been bullied;
- Students who are at risk of academic failure, who may particularly benefit from intensive, personalized instruction;
- Students who desire a comprehensive, robust full-time online school experience; and
- Students who, due to fear and anxiety caused by COVID-19, require a safe, healthy environment in which to learn.

Data provided by Pearson shows that Connections Academy online schools serve highly mobile students with complex needs known to impact academic performance. As demonstrated in the list above, these characteristics create a unique student population that differs from traditional brick-and-mortar schools.

Moving to an online school can be the answer to a variety of different student needs, including highly mobile students. Highly mobile students include:

- 11% Returning students with various challenges
- 8% Advanced students
- 11% Students with health problems
- 13% New students, previously bullied
- 11% New students, struggling academically
- 31% New students who want flexibility, online school choice
- 16% Returning students who want flexibility, online school choice³²

Now more than ever, Montana families need high-quality online education options, and the Board is committed to help meet this demand. The following represents the types of families for whom the Board believes MTCA will be an ideal school:

- Families desiring a safe learning environment. They want their kids to develop character and values in a safe learning environment, aligned with their values, which traditional schools can't offer.
- Families desiring an option to help students succeed in life and in their career. They need to find a flexible schooling option so they can be as successful as possible in their career. School is one component of life but not their everything.
- Families desiring an option for their children with neuro, physical or social diversities. They see diversities as superhero talents and strengths. As a parent it is their responsibility to find an environment for these talents and strengths to grow.

³² Source: Pearson Virtual Schools data compiled from Student Information Forms (SIF) completed by enrolling families.

- Families desiring a focus on academics and the brightest futures possible. To them, that is achieved through educational achievement – academic rigor and discipline are the primary drivers of any education decision.
- Families desiring a school to meet their highly mobile needs that traditional systems have failed to meet. These families may be struggling academically, may frequently change schools due to various family and crisis situations, may desire a safe space; they may come to MTCA after other options have failed.

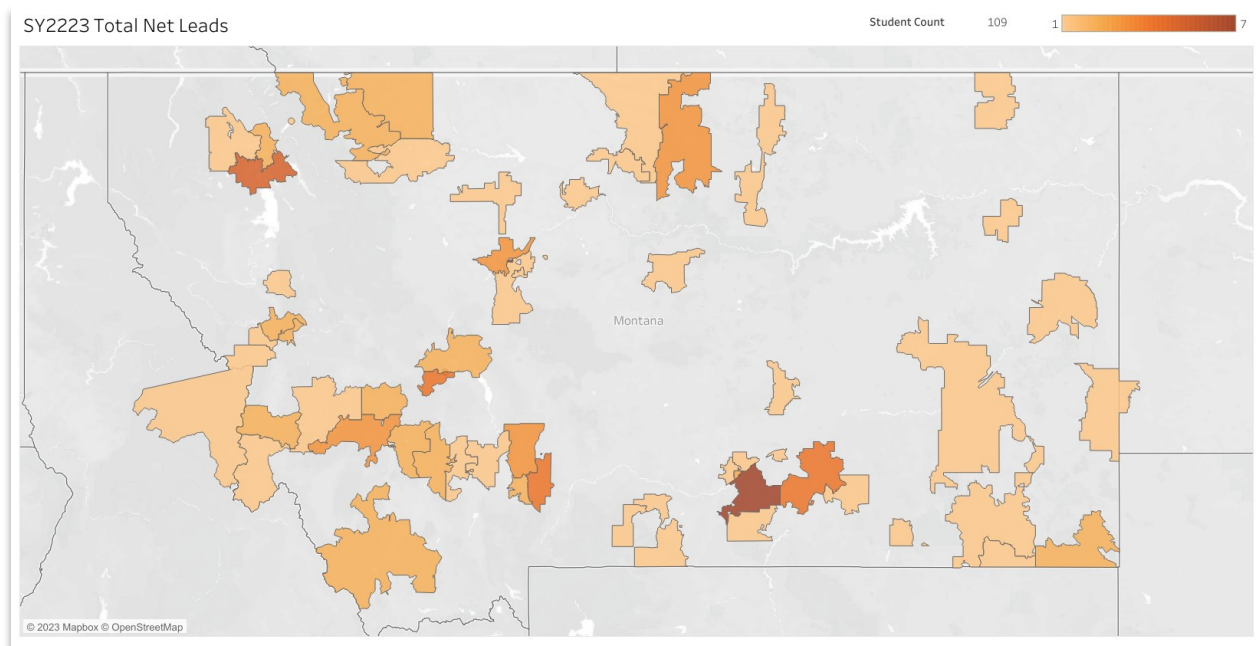
Of the students who attend a Connections Academy–affiliated school, over 40% met the federal free and reduced lunch guidelines.³³ The Board anticipates that MTCA families who will qualify for Free and Reduced-Priced Meals will align with the state average. The school will also serve a significant number of families with single parent/dual working parent households who find effective and creative ways to participate in MTCA. Furthermore, the Board also anticipates that 20% of students will come from homeschooling based upon experience in other Connections Academy–affiliated schools. Based on public school demographics in Montana, the Board anticipates similar student population with 77.75% White students, 10.92% American Indian, 5.38% Hispanic, 0.77% Black, 0.73% Asian, 0.2% Pacific Islander, 4.25% more than one race, 2.5% English Learners, approximately 13.4% Students with Disabilities, and approximately 39% who are eligible for Free and Reduced Meal (FARM). FARM data is based on families self-reporting, so while this is the estimated demographic based on the reported data, most likely, MTCA will be servicing more FRL students.

Organic Requests for Information: A scatter map has been created to demonstrate the compelling need and help visualize the strong interest shown in MTCA. This data represents families and students who have shown an interest and requested additional information on a virtual school option using the Connections Academy school model. It is important to note that these requests for information came in the total absence of marketing efforts.

There were over 800 organic requests for information from families in Montana on a Connections Academy school in the last five years, including over 150 in the last year, as shown in the graphic that follows. Although a significant portion of interest comes from the Billings metro areas, there is interest throughout the state.

³³ Source: https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d18/tables/dt18_204.10.asp

Figure 19. Over 800 requests have been received from families throughout Montana for information on a Connections Academy school from 2018 to 2023.



Meeting the Needs of the Community & Providing an Educational Opportunity for Students They Would Not Otherwise Receive at Their Traditional, Zoned School

Montana families are considering a Connections Academy school to meet their needs for these reasons:

- Heightened awareness of online learning as an option
- No equivalent program is offered
- To accommodate health concerns (student or family)
- Flexible schedule
- Safe environment
- To avoid bullying
- Personalized education
- Support from certified teachers
- More involvement with child's learning
- Accredited program
- Free public education
- Dissatisfaction with local school option
- Recognition that a quality full-time online program is more than an online meeting or self-paced course. It requires a comprehensive and integrated program with systems, curriculum, instructional practice, and teachers who are highly skilled in distance teaching and establishing 1-on-1 relationships with students, while monitoring their progress using real-time data—in compliance with state frameworks and standards. Such a program takes years to develop well.

In addition to the reasons listed above, MTCA will also provide Montana students across the state with College and Career Exploration and Readiness resources they may not otherwise be able to access. These resources include a Career Exploration and Community Platform, which is a series of interest and aptitude assessments that will connect students with exploration opportunities that align with their individual results. Students will also be provided with the option of taking career-focused CTE courses that can help prepare them to earn industry certifications across different Career Clusters. Strategic industry and college partnerships will enable the School to facilitate work-based learning opportunities that expose students to authentic post-secondary experiences and guide students to informed decisions about their futures beyond high school. Another resource is Career Coaches, who will work directly with the School staff to help students navigate all aspects of their College and Career preparation journey. Tri-Credit opportunities, through a unique partnership with Coursera and a network of college and university partners, will provide students the chance to simultaneously earn high school credit, industry certifications, and college credit. Lastly, as students in grades 6 through 12 progress and participate in experiential components of the program, they will be able to earn badges based on correlation to the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) Career Readiness Competencies through Pearson's Credly badging partnership.

True college and career readiness is all about making meaningful connections to learning/skill building and employment, and this partnership is a "connector" in the truest sense as it will help bring career exploration and readiness to students statewide. There is no other equivalent program in Montana that provides students throughout the state access to a high quality, full-time virtual school leveraging over twenty years' experience and help prepare students for their future.

Another reason that MTCA will meet a need in the community is the significant increase in homeschooling nationally over the last few years. In Montana, the population of students who are home schooling has increased by 45% since 2017-2018.³⁴ While this option will not meet all the needs of all homeschoolers, we believe that it will provide an additional option for students to learn at home with curriculum that meets Montana state standards and Montana-certified teachers.

27. Describe the opportunities and expectations for parent involvement.

27. Opportunities & Expectations for Parent Involvement

Parent involvement is significant to the online learning model in support of the School's mission to empower students to meet their unique educational and life goals through flexible pacing, college preparatory programming, and career skill development. There are many benefits to parent involvement in education. Parent participation in a child's education can lead to improved grades and test scores, higher graduation rates, and greater enrollment in post-secondary education.

Parents are crucial to the planning process of the School, as well as its operation. The skills and interests of parents will be leveraged as part of the career skill development program. The School will invite parents to share their talents during field trips and other sessions that will help to support the School's mission of career skill development. Interested parents have already played an important role in encouraging the formation of the School and will remain involved leading to the School's opening. Parental feedback is also an important hallmark of the School's outreach and information sessions in the community. MTCA will take full advantage of this valuable communication with families to ensure that the School reflects their unique needs and creative ideas.

³⁴ Source: https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/interactive/2023/homeschooling-growth-data-by-district/?itid=hp-top-table-main_p001_f003

Information Sessions: As stated earlier, there were 13 information sessions held throughout the state where parents joined to learn more about the School. The table below lists the information sessions held to inform and engage parents and the community about MTCA. The School hosted multiple in-person information sessions prior to submitting the online charter school application. In addition, letters of support were also gathered as evidence, a list of which has been included in Appendix A, Community Support. Information sessions will continue through August 2024 to assist enrolling families pending charter school approval.

Calendar of Parent and Community Information Sessions		
Date	Time	Location
October 12, 2023	9:00 – 11:00 a.m.	3115 10 th Avenue North, Billings, MT 59101
October 12, 2023	12:00 – 2:00 p.m.	3024 2nd Avenue North, Billings, MT 59101
October 12, 2023	3:00 – 4:30 p.m.	104 S 29th Street, Billings, MT 59101
October 13, 2023	9:00 – 10:30 a.m.	2204 Grant Road, Billings, MT 59102
October 13, 2023	11:00 – 12:00 p.m.	3115 10 th Avenue North, Billings, MT 59101
October 17, 2023	9:00 – 11:00 a.m.	812 Toole Avenue Suite D, Missoula, MT 59802
October 17, 2023	12:00 – 2:00 p.m.	600 South Ave W, Missoula, MT 59801
October 17, 2023	3:00 – 4:30 p.m.	741 S Higgins Ave Unit A, Missoula, MT 59801
October 18, 2023	9:00 – 10:30 a.m.	1925 Sherwood Street, Missoula, MT 59808
October 18, 2023	11:00 – 12:30 p.m.	2828 Mary Jane Boulevard, Missoula, MT 59808
October 23, 2023	4:00 – 5:00 p.m.	1765 North 19 th Avenue, Bozeman, MT 59718
October 24, 2023	9:00 – 10:30 a.m.	18 West Main Street, Bozeman, MT 59715
October 24, 2023	11:00 – 12:30 p.m.	624 North Wallace Avenue, Bozeman, MT 59715

Parents or other parent-designated caring adults will serve as Learning Coaches and play an active role in the learning process, providing input, and communicating regularly with teachers.

Parents may participate in MTCA in many ways, including:

Parents Involved in Planning the School: Parents of prospective students were offered multiple ways to provide input on the planning of the School prior to this application being submitted. At Information Sessions held around the state, parents provided valuable feedback and expressed a need for a full-time online program in Montana. Parents were most notably impressed with the vision to serve students who were not otherwise served by in-person options.

Public Comment: Parents may make public comments at public board meetings.

Community Coordinators: The parent Community Coordinators play a critical role in the School by contributing to a vibrant and active school community to serve the needs of families distributed across a wide geographic region. The Community Coordinators provide an important communication link between families and the School. Community Coordinators and staff will reach out to community-based organizations and businesses to coordinate face-to-face community service and field trip opportunities for students.

Parent Club: Parents can also join an exciting club that brings together parents of prospective students who reach out to their local communities to spread the word about MTCA and provide support and encouragement to parents.

StarTrack and Course Ratings: As mentioned previously, parent input will be gathered on an on-going basis via StarTrack ratings for lessons. On every lesson in the curriculum, and on the home page for each Learning Coach, there is a StarTrack rating box inviting ratings on a five-star scale and an opportunity to provide text feedback.

Annual Parent Satisfaction Survey: Parents will participate in a formal annual satisfaction survey, conducted by an independent third-party, to help identify what the School is doing well and how the School can improve in areas such as curriculum, teachers, and other aspects of the program.

The School will promote the significant role of parents by providing training for parents and multiple avenues for communication. As part of the Good Schools Model, students and Learning Coaches will complete an online orientation together. The orientation course is designed to familiarize them with the important role they play in supporting their student as a learner. Research shows that students are more successful when parent and students complete these sessions and engage with the platform³⁵; therefore, teachers will closely monitor completion of the course. The Learning Coach Support team offers various resources and programs for Learning Coaches including:

- **Learning Coach Central** – This website accessed from the Learning Coach Home Page in the EMS provides multiple resource documents, video, and helpful links that support Learning Coaches in their role and in providing instructional support to their student.
- **Learning Coach Success Series** – Learning Coaches are invited to attend live webinars that equip them with the skills and knowledge they need to assist their students in the online school environment. Time for questions and answers is provided at the end of each presentation. Recordings are available following the live webinars. The webinar series consists of two types of webinars.
 - The *Getting Started in Virtual School* series offered to new Learning Coaches provides detailed information introducing Learning Coaches to the EMS. Topics relevant to planning and organization to best support students in the home environment are also presented. Additionally, Learning Coaches are introduced to course and lesson structure and are shown how to use the lesson content to guide their students to academic success.
 - The *Adding to Your Learning Coach Toolbox* series is offered to all Learning Coaches throughout the year. This series provides information and tips to engage students surrounding topics like student motivation, the learning process, subject-specific learning, and character development.

³⁵ Source: Ricker, G. Belenky, D., & Koziarski, M. (2021). Are parents logged in? The Importance of parent involvement in K-12 online learning. *Journal of Online Learning Research*, 7(2), 185-201.

- **Learning Coach Community (optional)** – The School may choose to opt into a program that provides an online, interactive, school-sponsored forum for Learning Coaches to communicate with one another. The Learning Coach Support team monitors Learning Coach interaction and posts timely information, school announcements and advice from seasoned Learning Coaches.

Parents are key components of supporting the mission of MTCA. Parents will have the opportunity to participate in regional Facebook pages and participate in community-oriented activities (field trips, community meet ups, etc.) as part of the program. Through formal and informal channels from field trips to surveys, parents have an avenue to provide feedback and input. This ensures that the School will be on a cycle of continuous school improvement and that all stakeholders are valued. The School will draw upon the deep and diverse community connections represented on the Board, whose members represent business and education entities across the state and beyond, to ensure that students have multiple opportunities to benefit.

MTCA is not the equivalent of any current program offered in the entire state of Montana. It is a new option for parents and students who desire or are looking for that opportunity. Students and parents have asked for choices and options in their education. Their voices are important and matter to MTCA. Giving parents the choice in how to educate their children was cited multiple times as a reason why parents were interested in MTCA. It's our goal to help their children succeed in school and in the future.



Appendices

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APPENDIX A
Community Support

Statements of Support Received for Montana Connections Academy from October 13 to October 25, 2023

No.	First Initial	Last Name	County	State	Zip Code	Category
1.	C.	Huckabee	Blaine	MT	59523	Parent or Guardian
2.	K.	Tackett	Carbon	MT	59068	Parent or Guardian
3.	N.	Allen	Cascade	MT	59405	Parent or Guardian
4.	J.	W.	Cascade	MT	59405	Parent or Guardian
5.	N.	Salazar	Cascade	MT	59404	Parent or Guardian
6.	T.	Capshaw	Custer	MT	59301	Parent or Guardian
7.	G.	Clauson	Custer	MT	59301	Parent or Guardian
8.	M.	Tassano	Deer Lodge	MT	59711	Parent or Guardian
9.	C.	Schwartz	Fallon	MT	59501	Parent or Guardian
10.	T.	Barthel	Flathead	MT	59901	Parent or Guardian
11.	T.	Holloway	Flathead	MT	59937	Parent or Guardian
12.	M.	Grangroth	Flathead	MT	59912	Parent or Guardian
13.	T.	Johnson	Flathead	MT	59901	Parent or Guardian
14.	K.	Krebs	Flathead	MT	59911	Community Member
15.	B.	Kiefer	Flathead	MT	59922	Teacher
16.	R.	Harris	Flathead	MT	59901	Parent or Guardian
17.	J.	Sevier	Flathead	MT	59901	Parent or Guardian
18.	S.	Shepherd	Flathead	MT	59901	Parent or Guardian
19.	K.	Ruddick	Gallatin	MT	59714	Parent or Guardian

No.	First Initial	Last Name	County	State	Zip Code	Category
20.	M.	Not provided	Gallatin	MT	59718	Parent or Guardian
21.	J.	Matthews	Gallatin	MT	59741	Parent or Guardian
22.	A.	Drapes	Gallatin	MT	59715	Parent or Guardian
23.	J.	Dugas	Gallatin	MT	59718	Parent or Guardian
24.	J.	Kilgore	Hill	MT	59405	Parent or Guardian
25.	M.	Rider	Hill	MT	59521	Parent or Guardian
26.	A.	Goodvoice	Hill	MT	59521	Parent or Guardian
27.	J.	Brown	Jefferson	MT	59632	Parent or Guardian
28.	P.	Kish	Lake	MT	59911	Parent or Guardian
29.	J.	Blood	Lake	MT	59865	Parent or Guardian
30.	S.	Doll	Lake	MT	59865	Teacher
31.	P.	Smith	Lake	MT	59910	Parent or Guardian
32.	W.	Not provided	Lake	MT	59860	Parent or Guardian
33.	H.	Cutburth	Lewis and Clark	MT	59602	Parent or Guardian
34.	M.	Torgerson	Lewis and Clark	MT	59601	Parent or Guardian
35.	A.	Moniz	Lewis and Clark	MT	59601	Parent or Guardian
36.	K.	McLees	Lewis and Clark	MT	59602	Teacher
37.	J.	Vetter	Lincoln	MT	59923	Parent or Guardian
38.	L.	Haines	Lincoln	MT	59923	Parent or Guardian
39.	K.	Pillans	Lincoln	MT	59935	Parent or Guardian

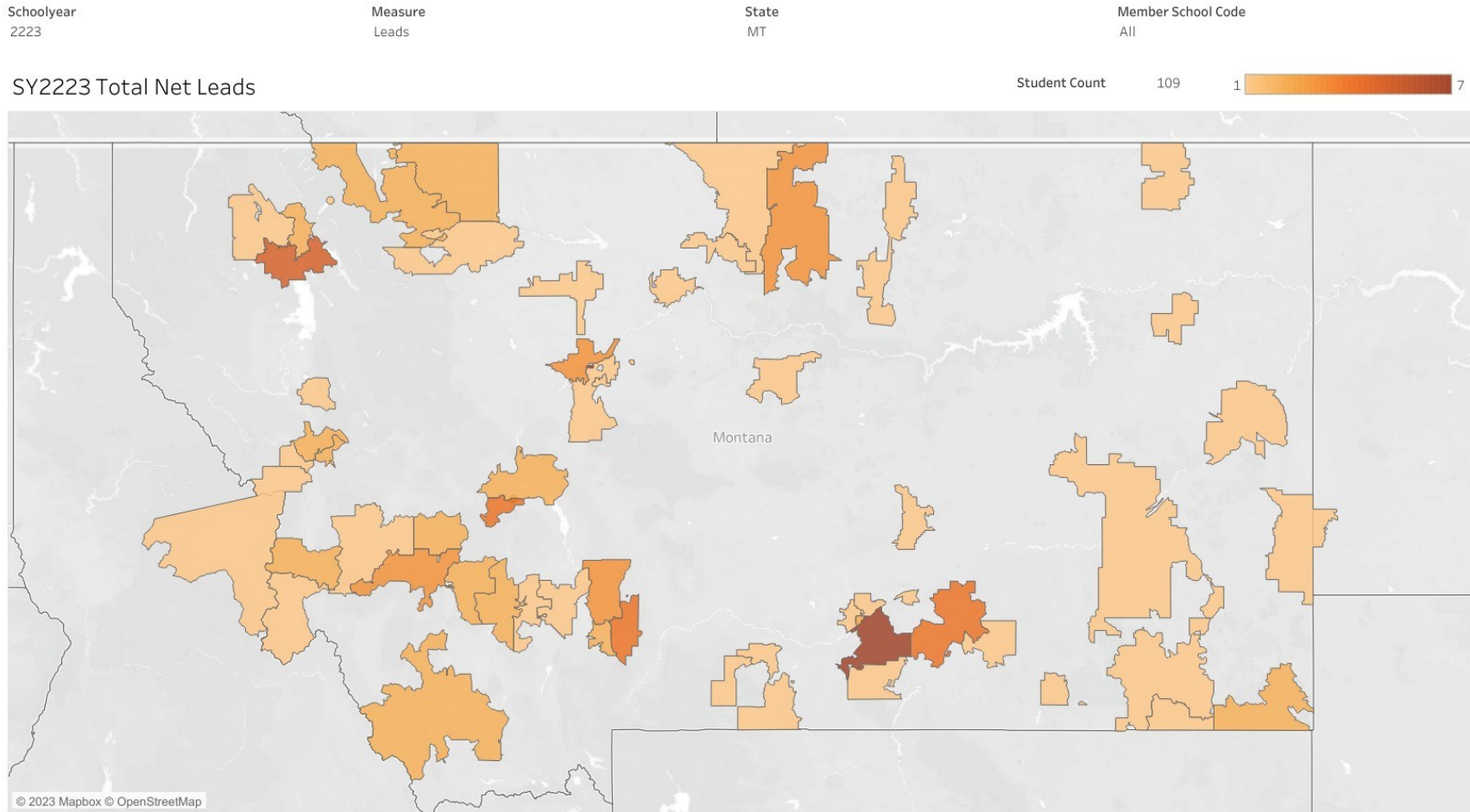
No.	First Initial	Last Name	County	State	Zip Code	Category
40.	J.	Sitton	Madison	MT	59754	Parent or Guardian
41.	K.	Watson	Madison	MT	59729	Parent or Guardian
42.	A.	Valle	Meagher	MT	59053	Parent or Guardian
43.	N.	Davis	Mineral	MT	59866	Community Member
44.	M.	Morris	Missoula	MT	59801	Parent or Guardian
45.	J.	Stagman	Missoula	MT	59806	Parent or Guardian
46.	D.	Kapor	Missoula	MT	59802	Parent or Guardian
47.	C.	Zier	Missoula	MT	59808	Parent or Guardian
48.	L.	Eggers	Missoula	MT	59802	Parent or Guardian
49.	J.	Harding	Missoula	MT	59802	Parent or Guardian
50.	J.	Lamb	Musselshell	MT	59072	Community Member
51.	C.	Kinamon	Pondera	MT	59425	Parent or Guardian
52.	A.	Rodriguez	Ravalli	MT	59870	Parent or Guardian
53.	J.	Heaney	Ravalli	MT	59701	Parent or Guardian
54.	N.	Feather	Ravalli	MT	59829	Parent or Guardian
55.	T.	Munly	Ravalli	MT	59828	Parent or Guardian
56.	P.	Short	Ravalli	MT	59870	Parent or Guardian
57.	S.	Campbell	Roosevelt	MT	59201	Parent or Guardian
58.	V.	White	Roosevelt	MT	59201	Parent or Guardian
59.	L.	Brown	Roosevelt	MT	59255	Parent or Guardian

No.	First Initial	Last Name	County	State	Zip Code	Category
60.	S.	McIntire	Sanders	MT	59853	Parent or Guardian
61.	C.	Trafford	Silver Bow	MT	59701	Parent or Guardian
62.	C.	McCurdy	Toole	MT	59474	Parent or Guardian
63.	W.	Vallejo	Valley	MT	59231	Student
64.	E.	Bethea	Valley	MT	59230	Community Member
65.	E.	Louison	Wheatland	MT	59036	Parent or Guardian
66.	A.	Ferguson	Yellowstone	MT	59105	Parent or Guardian
67.	J.	Rudolph	Yellowstone	MT	59105	Parent or Guardian
68.	C.	Viger	Yellowstone	MT	59101	Parent or Guardian
69.	E.	Brown	Yellowstone	MT	59101	Parent or Guardian
70.	D.	Shrinarine	Yellowstone	MT	59101	Parent or Guardian
71.	J.	Sarsfield	Yellowstone	MT	59102	Parent or Guardian
72.	M.	Limberhand	Yellowstone	MT	59105	Parent or Guardian
73.	A.	Bailey	Yellowstone	MT	59101	Parent or Guardian
74.	R.	Meech	Yellowstone	MT	59101	Parent or Guardian
75.	C.	LaFranier	Yellowstone	MT	59102	Parent or Guardian
76.	C.	Orth	Yellowstone	MT	59044	Parent or Guardian
77.	L.	Zent	Yellowstone	MT	59101	Teacher
78.	T.	Line	Yellowstone	MT	59079	Parent or Guardian

No.	First Initial	Last Name	County	State	Zip Code	Category
79.	A.	Hunter-Patterson	Yellowstone	MT	59101	Parent or Guardian
80.	M.	Rambo	Yellowstone	MT	59101	Parent or Guardian
81.	M.	Jawort	Yellowstone	MT	59101	Parent or Guardian
82.	G.	Hlavaty	Yellowstone	MT	59105	Parent or Guardian

Full addresses can be provided to BPE upon request.

Evidence of Interest for Montana Connections Academy 2022-2023



Data gathered from online requests for information on a full-time Connections Academy online school in Montana

APPENDIX B
Park City School District Policies & Bylaws

PARK CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT

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PARK CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT

**1000 SERIES
THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES**

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Park City School District

THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

1000

Legal Status and Organization

The Board of Trustees of the Park City School District No. 5 is the governmental entity established by the State of Montana to plan and direct all aspects of the District's operations. The District is governed by a Board of Trustees consisting of five (5) members. The District is classified as a class 2 district and is operated according to the laws and regulations pertaining to a class 2 districts.

All trustees shall participate on an equal basis with other members in all business transactions pertaining to the District.

The policies of the Board define the organization of the Board and the manner of conducting its official business. The Board's powers and duties include the broad authority to adopt and enforce all powers and duties of the Board that are derived from the Montana Constitution, state statutes, and regulations.

Legal Reference 20-3-323, MCA District policy and record of acts
 20-3-324, MCA Powers and Duties
 20-3-341, MCA Number of trustee positions in elementary school districts

Policy History

Adopted on: 6.13.2106

Revised on:

Park City School District

THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

1110

Taking Office

A newly elected Trustee shall take office as soon as election results have been certified and the newly elected Trustee has taken and subscribed to an oath to faithfully and impartially discharge the duties of the office to the best of his/her ability. The person shall qualify by taking an oath of office administered by the county superintendent, the superintendent's designee, or any officer provided for by law. Such oath must be filed with the county superintendent not more than fifteen (15) days after the receipt of the certificate of election or the appointment.

Except as otherwise provided by law, Trustees shall hold office for terms of three (3) years, or until their successors are elected and qualified. Terms of Trustees are staggered as provided by law.

Legal References:	§ 1-6-101, MCA	Officers who may administer oaths
	§ 2-16-116, MCA	Power to administer oaths
	§ 20-1-202, MCA	Oath of office
	§ 20-3-307, MCA	Qualification and oath
	§20-3-301, MCA	Election and term of office

Policy History

Adopted on: 6.13.2016

Revised on:

Park City School District

THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

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Election

Elections conducted by the District are nonpartisan and are governed by general election laws of the state of Montana. The ballot at such elections may include candidates for Trustee positions, various public policy propositions, and advisor questions.

Board elections shall take place on the first (1st) Tuesday after the first (1st) Monday in May of each year. Any person who is a qualified voter of the District is legally qualified to become a Trustee. A declaration of intent to be a candidate must be submitted to the District Clerk at least forty (40) days before the regular school election day. If different terms are to be filled, the term for which each candidate is nominated also shall be indicated. Any person seeking to become a write-in candidate for a Trustee position shall file a declaration of intent no later than 5:00 p.m. on the day before the ballot certification deadline in 20-20-401, MCA. If the number of candidates filing for vacant positions or filing a declaration of intent to be a write-in candidate is equal to or less than the number of positions to be elected, the Trustees may give notice no later than thirty (30) days before the election that a Trustee election will not take place. If a Trustee election is not held, the Trustees shall declare the candidates elected by acclamation and shall issue a “certificate of election” to each candidate.

A candidate intending to withdraw from the election shall send a statement of withdrawal to the Clerk of the District containing all information necessary to identify the candidate and the office for which the candidate filed. The statement of withdrawal must be acknowledged by the Clerk of the District. A candidate may not withdraw after 5:00 p.m. the day before the ballot certification deadline in 20-20-401, MCA.

In the event of an unforeseen emergency occurring on the date scheduled for the funding election, the District will be allowed to reschedule the election for a different day of the calendar year.

In years when the Legislature meets in regular session or in a special session that affects school funding, the Trustees may order the election on a date other than the regular school election day in order for the electors to consider a proposition requesting additional funding under § 20-9-353, MCA.

Legal Reference:	§ 13-10-211, MCA	Declaration of intent for write-in candidates
	§ 20-3-304, MCA	Annual election
	§ 20-3-305, MCA	Candidate qualification, nomination and withdrawal
	§ 20-3-313, MCA	Election by acclamation – notice
	§ 20-3-322, MCA	Meetings and quorum

§ 20-3-324(4), MCA	Powers and duties
§ 20-3-344, MCA	Nomination of candidates by petition in first-class elementary district
§ 20-9-353, MCA	Additional financing for general fund – election for authorization to impose
§ 20-20-105, MCA	Regular school election day and special school elections – limitation – exception
§ 20-20-204, MCA	Election Notice
§ 20-20-301, MCA	Qualifications of elector

Policy History

Adopted on: 6.13.2106

Revised on:

Park City School District

THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

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Resignation and Other Vacancies

A Trustee position becomes vacant before the expiration of a term, when any of the following occurs:

1. Death of the incumbent;
2. Resignation, in writing, filed with the Clerk;
3. Incumbent moves out of the district, establishing residence elsewhere;
4. Incumbent is no longer a registered elector of the District under the provisions of §20-20-301, MCA;
5. Incumbent is absent from the District for sixty (60) consecutive days;
6. Incumbent fails to attend three (3) consecutive meetings of the trustees without good reason;
7. Incumbent has been removed under the provisions of § 20-3-310, MCA; or
8. Incumbent ceases to have the capacity to hold office under any other provision of law.

A Trustee position also shall be vacant when an elected candidate fails to qualify.

When a Trustee vacancy occurs, the remaining trustees shall declare such position vacant and fill such vacancy by appointment. The Board will receive applications from any qualified persons seeking to fill the position after such notices as determined by the board to be appropriate. The Board will appoint one (1) candidate to fill the position. Should the Board fail to fill a vacancy within sixty (60) days from the creation of a vacancy, the county superintendent shall appoint, in writing, a competent person to fill such vacancy. An appointee shall qualify by completing and filing an oath of office with the county superintendent within fifteen (15) days after receiving notice of the appointment and shall serve until the next regularly scheduled school election and a successor has qualified.

Resignation of a Trustee, for whatever reason, must be submitted in writing to the Clerk. A resignation is effective seventy-two (72) hours after its submission unless withdrawn during that period by the register through written notification of withdrawal made to the Clerk. The Board will ratify the resignation at its next regularly scheduled meeting and will proceed to fill the vacancy as provided by statute and Board policy.

Legal References:	§ 2-16-502, MCA	Registrations
	§ 20-3-308, MCA	Vacancy of trustee position
	§ 20-3-309, MCA	Filling vacated trustee position – appointee qualification and term of office

Policy History

Adopted on: 6.13.2016

Revised on:

Park City School District

THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

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Annual Organization Meeting

After issuance of election certificates to newly elected Trustees in May, and on or before the third (3rd) Saturday in May, the Board shall elect from among its members a Chairperson and a Vice Chairperson to serve one (1) year terms. If a Board member is unable to continue to serve as an officer, a replacement shall be elected immediately. In the absence of both the Chairperson and the Vice Chairperson, the Board shall elect a Chairperson *pro tempore*, who shall perform the functions of the Chairperson during the latter's absence. The Clerk shall act as Board secretary.

Legal References:	§ 20-3-321, MCA	Organization and officers
	§ 20-3-322(a), MCA	Meetings and quorum
	§ 1-5-416(1)(b), MCA	Powers and duties of Notary Public

Policy History

Adopted on: 6.13.2016

Revised on:

Park City School District

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Committees

Board Member Committees

The Board may create Board member committees as deemed necessary. The Board Chair will make all appointments to Board member committees. Notice of Board member committee meetings shall be given in the same manner as notice for special meetings, and Board member committee meetings shall be open to the public.

Citizen Committees

The Board or the Superintendent may create committees that involve community members as deemed necessary, either on an *ad hoc* or regular basis. The Board Chair or the Superintendent will make all appointments to citizen committees and will establish the parameters and duties for the citizen committees. Notice of citizen committee meetings shall be given in the same manner as notice for special meetings, and citizen committee meetings shall be open to the public.

Administrative Committees

The Superintendent may create administrative committees as deemed necessary. The Superintendent will make all appointments to the administrative committees. In determining whether an administrative committee meeting shall be open to the public, the following factors, although not exhaustive in nature, should be considered: (1) the frequency of the meeting held; (2) whether the committee is deliberating or just gathering facts; (3) whether the deliberations concern a matter of policy rather than ministerial or administrative functions; (4) whether the committee members have executive authority and experience; and (5) the results of the meeting. If the presiding officer determines that the administrative committee should be held in compliance with the Open Meeting Act, he shall provide notice of the meeting in the same manner as notice for a special meeting, and the administrative meeting shall be open to the public.

Policy History

Adopted on: 8.16.2016

Revised on:

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Qualifications, Terms, and Duties of Board Officers

The Board officers are the Chairperson and Vice Chairperson. These officers are elected at the annual organizational meeting.

Chairperson

The Board elects a Chairperson from its members for a one (1) year term. The Chairperson may be any trustee of the board, including an additional trustee as provided for in 20-3-352(2). If an additional Trustee is chosen to serve as the Chairperson of an elementary district described in 20-3-351(1)(a), the additional trustee may not vote on issues pertaining only to the elementary district. The duties of the Chairperson include the following:

- Preside at all meetings and conduct meetings in the manner prescribed by the Board's policies;
- Make all Board committee appointments, subject to Board approval;
- Sign all papers and documents as required by law and as authorized by action of the Board;
- Close Board meetings as authorized by Montana law; and
- Act as spokesperson for the Board.

The Chairperson is permitted to participate in all Board meetings in a manner equal to all other Board members, including the right to participate in debate and to vote. The Chairperson may not make a motion, but may second motions.

Vice Chairperson

The Vice Chairperson shall preside at all Board meetings in the absence of the Chairperson and shall perform all the duties of the Chairperson during the Chairperson's absence or unavailability. The Vice Chairperson shall work closely with the Chairperson and shall assume whatever duties the Chairperson may delegate.

Legal References: § 2-3-203, MCA

§ 20-3-321(2), MCA

Meetings of public agencies and certain associations of public agencies to be open to public – exceptions
Organization and officers

Policy History

Adopted on: 6.13.2016

Revised on:

Park City School District

THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

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Clerk

The Clerk of the Board shall attend all meetings of the Board, unless excused by the Chair, and keep an accurate journal of its proceedings. The Clerk shall have custody of the records, books, and documents of the Board. In the absence or inability of the Clerk to attend a Board meeting, the Board will designate a person to serve as Clerk for the meeting have one (1) of their members or a District employee act as clerk for the meeting, and said person will supply the Clerk with a certified copy of the proceedings.

The Clerk will keep accurate and detailed accounts of all receipts and disbursements made by the District. The Clerk shall draw and countersign all warrants for expenditures that have been approved by the Board of Trustees.

The Clerk will make the preparations legally required for the notice and conduct of all District elections.

The Clerk shall prepare and submit to the Board a financial report of receipts and disbursements of all school funds on an annual basis unless the Board requests such reports on a more frequent basis. The Clerk shall perform other duties as prescribed by state law or as directed by the Board.

Legal References:	20-3-321, MCA	Organization and officers
	20-3-325, MCA	Clerk of the district
	10.55.701, ARM	Board of Trustees

Policy History

Adopted on: 6.13.2016

Revised on:

Park City School District

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Duties of Individual Trustees

The authority of individual Trustees is limited to participating in actions taken by the Board as a whole when legally in session. Trustees shall not assume responsibilities of administrators or other staff members. The Board or staff shall not be bound by an action taken or statement made by an individual Trustee except when such statement or action is pursuant to specific instructions and official action taken by the Board.

Each Trustee shall review the agenda and any study materials distributed prior to the meeting and be prepared to participate in the discussion and decision-making for each agenda item. Each Trustee shall visit each school not less than once per year to examine its management, conditions and needs.

Each member is obligated to attend Board meetings regularly. Whenever possible, each Trustee shall give notice to the Chair or Superintendent of the Trustee's inability to attend a Board meeting. A majority of the Board may excuse a Trustee's absence from a meeting if requested to do so. The Board shall declare a position vacant after three (3) consecutive unexcused absences from regular Board meetings or if the Trustee has been absent from the District for sixty (60) consecutive days.

Cross Reference:	1113	Vacancies
Legal References:	20-3-201, MCA	Election and term of office
	20-3-308, MCA	Vacancy of Trustee position
	20-3-324(21), MCA	Powers and duties
	20-3-332, MCA	Personal liability of trustees

Policy History

Adopted on: 6.13.2016

Revised on:

Park City School District

THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

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District Policy

Adoption and Amendment of Policies

It is the intent of the Board to develop written policies to serve as guidelines and goals for the successful and efficient functioning of the District. The policies are framed and are meant to be interpreted in terms of state statute, administrative rules, and all other regulatory agencies within our local, county, state, and federal levels of government. The policies are also framed and are meant to be interpreted in terms of those educational objectives, procedures, and practices that are broadly accepted by leaders and authorities in the public education field.

Changes in needs, conditions, purposes, and objectives will require revisions, deletions, and additions to the policies of the current Board and those of the future. The Board welcomes suggestions for ongoing policy development.

Policy proposals and suggested amendments to or revisions of existing policies shall be submitted in writing prior to a regularly scheduled board meeting. All new or amended policies become effective upon adoption, unless a specific effective date is provided in the motion for adoption. Minutes of each meeting shall reflect any readings and action taken.

Legal References: § 20-3-323, MCA District policy and record of acts
 10.55.701, ARM Board of Trustees

Policy History

Adopted on: 8.16.2016

Revised on:

Park City School District

THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

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Board Meetings

For all meetings of the Board and its committees, the Clerk or designee shall satisfy all notice and posting requirements contained herein, as well as the Open Meetings Act. This shall include providing meeting notification to news media that have officially requested it. Except for an unforeseen emergency or as described below, all meetings must be held in a District building or, by unanimous consent of the Board, in a publicly accessible building located within the District. The Trustees may meet outside the boundaries of the District for collaboration or cooperation on educational issues with other school boards, educational agencies, or cooperatives. Adequate notice of the meeting as well as an agenda will be provided to the public in advance, and decision making must still occur only at properly noticed meetings held within the District's boundaries.

Regular Meetings

Unless otherwise specified by the Board, all regular meetings are held on second Tuesday of the month at 7:00 pm, in the multipurpose room. If the time or place of a Board meeting is changed, notice shall be given in the same manner as provided for special meetings. The Board may choose to not convene a meeting in the month of July if there is no pressing business to attend to at that time.

Special Meetings

Special meetings may be called by the Board Chair or by any two (2) members of the Trustees. A written notice of a special meeting, stating the purpose of the meeting, must be provided to each Trustee not less than forty-eight (48) hours prior to the time of the meeting. The 48 hour written notice is waived in the event of an unforeseen emergency or to consider a violation of the student code of conduct within a week of graduation. Written notice shall also be sent not less than twenty-four (24) hours prior to the meeting to each newspaper and radio or television station that has filed a written request for such notices.

Committee Meetings

Committee meetings may be called by the Committee Chair, and are subject to the requirements of the Open Meetings Act, including notice and posting requirements.

Budget Meetings

On or before August 20 of each year, the Board shall meet to consider all budget information and any attachments required by law. The Board may continue the meeting from day to day but shall adopt the final budget for the District and determine the amounts to be raised by tax levies for the District not later than August 25, and before the computation of the general fund net levy requirement by the county superintendent and the fixing of the tax levies for each district.

Between July 1 and August 10 of each year, the Clerk shall publish one notice, in the *Billings Gazette*, stating the date, time, and place that the Board will meet for the purpose of considering and adopting the final budget. The notice must also state that the meeting may continue from day to day until the final adoption of the budget, and that any taxpayer may appear at the meeting and be heard for or against any part of the budget.

Organizational Meeting

After the issuance of the election certificates to the newly elected trustees in May, but not later than fifteen (15) days after the election, the Board shall convene and elect from among its members a Chair and a Vice-Chair to serve one (1) year terms. The Chair shall serve until the next organization meeting and shall preside at all the meetings of the Board. In addition, the Board shall employ and appoint a competent person as the Clerk of the District at this meeting.

Emergency Meetings

In the event of a storm, fire, explosion, community disaster, insurrection, act of God, or other unforeseen destruction or impairment of school district property that affects the health and safety of the Trustees, students, District employees, or the educational functions of the district, the Board may meet immediately and take official action without prior notification.

Closed Session of Any Meeting

The Board or any committee may hold closed sessions to consider matters of individual privacy or to discuss a strategy to be followed with respect to litigation when an open meeting would have a detrimental effect on the litigating position of the District. Prior to closing the meeting to consider matters of individual privacy, the presiding officer must determine that the demands of individual privacy exceed the merits of public disclosure. The litigation strategy exception is not available if the litigation involves only public bodies or associations as parties.

Legal References:	§ 2-3-103, MCA	Public participation – governor to ensure guidelines adopted
	§ 2-3-104, MCA	Requirements for compliance with notice provisions
	§ 2-3-105, MCA	Supplemental notice by radio or television
	§ 2-3-201, MCA	Legislative intent – liberal construction
	§ 2-3-203, MCA	Meetings of public agencies and certain associations of public agencies to be open to public – exceptions
	§ 20-3-322, MCA	Meeting and quorum
	§ 20-9-115, MCA	Notice of final budget meeting
	§ 20-9-131, MCA	Final budget meeting
	10.55.701, ARM	Board of Trustees

Policy History

Adopted on: 6.13.2016

Revised on:

Park City School District

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Records Available to Public

The District is committed to effective records management including meeting legal standards for record retention and protection of privacy, optimizing the use of space, minimizing the cost of record retention, and properly destroying outdated records. This policy applies to all records, regardless of whether they are maintained in hard (paper) copy, electronically, or in some other fashion.

The District requires that its records be maintained in a consistent and logical manner and be managed so that the District:

1. Meets legal standards for protection, storage and retrieval;
2. Protects the privacy of students and employees of the District;
3. Optimizes the use of space;
4. Minimizes the cost of record retention; and
5. Destroys outdated records in an appropriate manner.

The Superintendent shall establish appropriate records management procedures and practices, which shall be provided to staff members who manage records within the District. The Board acknowledges the importance of public records as the record of the acts of the District and the repository of information about the District. The Board acknowledges the public's right to inspect and copy the District's public records, with certain exceptions. Unless otherwise provided by law, a public record shall be accessible for inspection and duplication either by written or oral request. The District shall respond to all such requests within a reasonable period of time, generally not to exceed 10 business days. If the District cannot respond to the request within 10 business days, the records custodian shall notify the requestor in writing and provide a timeline for response to the request. If an oral request is not responded to within 10 business days, the requestor must put the request in writing.

The Superintendent shall designate essential records which are immediately necessary to

- Respond to an emergency or disaster;
- Begin recovery or reestablishment of operations during and after an emergency or disaster;
- Protect the health, safety, and property of District students and employees; or
- Protect the assets, obligations, rights, history and resources of the District, its employees, and students.

The District will provide copies of all documents, including electronic communications, in the

medium in which those documents exist. Reasonable fees shall be charged for copies as follows:

- copies of Board minutes at .15¢ per page;
- copies of other materials at .25¢ per page;
- the actual costs directly incident to fulfilling a records request in the most cost-efficient and timely manner possible, including but not limited to the time required to gather the requested information; and
- actual cost of purchasing the electronic media used for transferring data, if the person requesting the information does not provide the media;

Legal Reference:	§ 2-6-102, MCA	Citizen entitled to inspect and copy public writings
	§ 20-3-323, MCA	District Policy and Record of Acts
	§ 20-9-213, MCA	Duties of Trustees

Policy History

Adopted on: 6.13.2016

Revised:

Park City School District

THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

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School Board Meeting Procedure

Agenda

The agenda for any Board meeting shall be prepared by the Superintendent in consultation with the Board Chair. Items submitted by Board members and citizens may be placed on the agenda, though such requests are not required to be placed on the agenda. Such suggestions must be received by the Superintendent at least six (6) days before the Board meeting, unless of immediate importance as determined by the Superintendent. Individuals who wish to be placed on the Board agenda must also notify the Superintendent, in writing, of the request. The request must include the reason for the appearance. If the reason for the appearance is a complaint against any District employee, the individual filing the complaint must demonstrate that the Uniform Complaint Procedure has been followed. Citizens wishing to make brief comments about school programs or procedures or items on the agenda need not request placement on the agenda, and may ask for recognition by the Chairperson at the appropriate time.

The agenda also must include a “public comment” portion to allow members of the general public to comment on any public matter under the jurisdiction of the District which is not specifically listed on the agenda, except that no member of the public will be allowed to comment on contested cases or other adjudicative proceedings, the Board Chairperson may place reasonable time limits on any “public comment” period to maintain and ensure effective and efficient operations of the Board. The Board may not take action on any matter discussed in the public comment section.

With consent of a majority of members present, the order of business at any meeting may be changed. Copies of the agenda for the current Board meeting, minutes of the previous Board meeting, and relevant supplementary information will be prepared and distributed to each trustee at least forty-eight (48) hours in advance of a Board meeting and will be available to any interested citizen at the Superintendent’s office forty-eight (48) hours before a Board meeting. An agenda for other types of Board meetings will be prepared, if circumstances require an agenda.

Consent Agenda

To expedite business at its meetings, the Board approves the use of a consent agenda, which includes those items considered to be routine in nature. Any item that appears on the consent agenda may be removed by a member of the Board. Remaining items will be voted on by a single motion. The approved motion will be recorded in the minutes, including a listing of all items appearing on the consent agenda.

Minutes

The Clerk or the Clerk's designee shall keep written minutes of all meetings that must be open to the public. The approved minutes must be signed by the Chair and the Clerk. The minutes must include:

- the date, time and place of the meeting;
- the name of the presiding officer;
- a record of Board members present and absent;
- a summary of the discussion on all matters discussed, proposed, deliberated or decided,
and a record of any motions made and votes taken;
- a detailed statement of all expenditures;
- the purpose of recessing into closed session; and
- the time of adjournment.

The Clerk shall keep minutes of student disciplinary actions that are educationally related that are taken by the Board, including those portions held in closed session. The Board shall keep minutes during all closed sessions. Minutes taken during closed sessions shall be sealed.

The Board may direct the Clerk to make a verbatim record of any meeting. Any verbatim recording may be destroyed after the minutes are approved. A file of permanent minutes of all meetings shall be maintained in the office of the Clerk. A written copy of the minutes shall be made available to the public within five (5) days following approval by the Board. Sealed minutes taken during any closed session of the Board shall not be made available to the public absent a court order.

If the meeting is audio recorded and designated by the Board as the official record, a written record of the meeting must also be made and must include the information specified above. In addition, a log or time stamp for each main agenda item is required for the purpose of providing assistance to the public in accessing that portion of the meeting.

Quorum

No business shall be transacted at any meeting of the Board unless a quorum of its members is present. A majority of the full membership of the Board shall constitute a quorum, whether the individuals are present physically or electronically. A majority of the quorum may pass a resolution, except as provided in § 20-4-203(1), MCA, and § 20-4-401(4), MCA.

Meeting Conduct and Order of Business

General rules of parliamentary procedure are used for every Board meeting. *Robert's Rules of Order* may be used as a guide at any meeting. The order of business shall be reflected on the agenda. The use of proxy votes shall not be permitted. Voting rights are reserved to those trustees in attendance. Voting shall be by acclamation or show of hands.

Cross Reference:	1441	Audience Participation
Legal References:	§ 2-3-103, MCA	Public participation - governor to ensure guidelines adopted
	§ 2-3-202, MCA	Meeting defined
	§ 2-3-212, MCA	Minutes of meetings – public inspection
	§ 20-1-212, MCA	Destruction of records by school officer
	§ 20-3-322, MCA	Meetings and quorum
	§ 20-3-323, MCA	District policy and record of acts
	<i>Jones and Nash v. Missoula Co., 2006 M T2, 330 Mont 2005</i>	

Policy History

Adopted on: 6.13.2016
Reviewed on: 2.13.2018
Revised on:

Park City School District

THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Abstentions From Voting

Section 20-3-323(2), MCA, requires the minutes of each Board meeting to include the voting records of each Trustee present. Under Montana law, instances in which it would be unlawful or inappropriate for a Trustee to cast a vote on a particular issue include, but are not necessarily limited to, the following:

1. When hiring the relative of a Trustee;
2. When casting a vote would directly and substantially affect, to its economic benefit, a business or other undertaking in which the Trustee either has a substantial financial interest or in which the Trustee is engaged as counsel, consultant, representative, or agent;
3. When casting a vote would directly and substantially affect a business or other undertaking to its economic detriment, where a Trustee has a substantial personal interest in a competing firm or undertaking;
4. When casting a vote would cause a Trustee to have a pecuniary interest, either directly or indirectly, in a contract made by the Trustee (while acting in the Trustee’s official capacity) or by the Board; and
5. When casting a vote would put the Trustee in the position of an agent or solicitor in the sale or supply of goods or services to the District.

In addition, a Trustee shall be allowed to abstain from voting to avoid the appearance of impropriety or the appearance of a perceived conflict. If a Trustee abstains from voting, the abstention should be recorded in the minutes. The Board discourages abstentions, unless the reasons are substantiated as provided herein.

Legal References:	§ 2-2-302, MCA	Appointment of relative to office of trust or emolument unlawful – exceptions – publication of notice
	§ 20-3-323, MCA	District policy and record of acts
	§ 2-2-121, MCA	Rules of conduct for public officers and public employees
	§ 2-2-105, MCA	Ethical requirements for public officers and public employees
	§ 20-9-204, MCA	Conflicts of interests, letting contracts, and calling for bids
	§ 20-1-201, MCA	School officers not to act as agents

Policy History

Adopted on: 6.13.2016

Revised on:

Park City School District

THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

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Audience Participation and Public Comment

It is important for all participants to remember that Board meetings are held in public but are not public meetings. Members of the public shall be recognized and allowed input during the meeting, at the discretion of the Chairperson.

The Board recognizes the value of public comment on educational issues and the importance of involving members of the public in its meetings. The Board also recognizes the statutory and constitutional rights of the public to participate in governmental operations. Montana law requires school districts and other public agencies to include on the agenda for public meetings an item allowing public comment on any public matter not otherwise specifically listed on the agenda that is within the jurisdiction of the District.

To allow fair and orderly expression of public comments, the Board will permit general comment public participation pertaining to Park City School District issues that are NOT specifically listed on the agenda through oral or written comments during the District's General Purpose "public comment" section of the Board agenda. The Board will permit public comment specific to an agenda item prior to a final decision on a matter of significant interest to the public. The Chairperson shall control such comment to ensure an orderly progression of the meeting, placing further reasonable time limits on comments in order to maintain and ensure effective and efficient operations of the Board meeting.

Cross Reference: 1420 School Board Meeting Procedure

Legal Reference: Article II, Section 8, Montana Constitution – Right of participation
Article II, Section 10, Montana Constitution – Right of privacy
§§ 2-3-101, et seq., MCA Notice and Opportunity to Be Heard

Policy History

Adopted on: 6.13.2016

Reviewed on 2.13.2018

Revised on:

Park City School District

THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

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Code of Ethics for School Board Members

AS A MEMBER OF MY LOCAL BOARD OF TRUSTEES, I WILL STRIVE TO IMPROVE PUBLIC EDUCATION, AND TO THAT END I WILL:

Attend all regularly schedule Board meetings insofar as possible, and become informed concerning the issues to be considered at those meetings;

Recognize that I should endeavor to make policy decisions only after full discussion at publicly held Board meetings;

Render all decisions based on the available facts and my independent judgment, and refuse to surrender that judgment to individuals or special interest groups;

Encourage the free expression of opinion by all Board members, and seek systematic communications between the Board and students, staff, and all elements of the community;

Work with other Board members to establish effective Board policies and to delegate authority for the administration to the Superintendent;

Recognize and respect the responsibilities that properly are delegated to the Superintendent;

Communicate to the Superintendent expression of public reaction to Board policies, school programs, or staff;

Inform myself about current educational issues by individual study and through participation in programs providing needed information, such as those sponsored by the Montana and National School Boards Associations;

Support the employment of those persons best qualified to serve as school staff, and insist on regular and impartial evaluation of staff;

Avoid being placed in a position of conflict of interest, and refrain from using my Board position for personal or partisan gain;

Avoid compromising the Board or administration by inappropriate individual action or comments, and respect the confidentiality of information that is privileged under application law;

Remember always that my first and greatest concern must be the educational welfare of the students attending public schools.

Policy History

Adopted on: 6.13.2016

Revised on:

Park City School District

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Conflict of Interest

A Trustee may not:

1. Engage in a substantial financial transaction for the Trustee's private business purpose, with a person whom the Trustee inspects or supervises in the course of official duties.
2. Perform an official act directly and substantially affecting, to its economic benefit, a business or other undertaking in which the Trustee either has a substantial financial interest or is engaged as counsel, consultant, representative, or agent.
3. Act as an agent or solicitor in the sale or supply of goods or services to a district.
4. Have a pecuniary interest, directly or indirectly, in any contract made by the Board, when the Trustee has more than a ten percent (10%) interest in the corporation. A contract does not include: 1) merchandise sold to the highest bidder at public auctions; 2) investments or deposits in financial institutions that are in the business of loaning or receiving money, when such investments or deposits are made on a rotating or ratable basis among financial institutions in the community or when there is only one (1) financial institution in the community; or 3) contracts for professional services other than salaried services or for maintenance or repair services or supplies when the services or supplies are not reasonably available from other sources, if the interest of any Board member and a determination of such lack of availability are entered in the minutes of the Board meeting at which the contract is considered.
5. Be employed in any capacity by the District, with the exception of officiating at athletic competitions under the auspices of the Montana Officials Association.
6. Appoint to a position of trust or emolument any person related or connected by consanguinity within the fourth (4th) degree or by affinity within the second (2nd) degree.
 - a. This prohibition does not apply to the issuance of an employment contract to a person as a substitute teacher who is not employed as a substitute teacher for more than thirty five (35) consecutive school days.
 - b. This prohibition does not apply to the renewal of an employment contract of a person related to a Board member, who was initially hired before the Board member assumed the Trustee position.
 - c. This prohibition does not apply if Trustees comply with the following requirements: 1) All Trustees, except the Trustee related to the person to be employed or appointed, vote to employ the related person; 2) the Trustee related to the person to be employed abstains from voting; and 3) the Trustees give fifteen (15) days written notice of the time and place of their intended action in a newspaper of general circulation in the county where the school is located.

Policy History:

Adopted on: 6.13.2016

Revised on:

Park City School District

THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

1513

Management Rights

The Board retains the right to operate and manage their affairs in such areas as but not limited to:

1. Direct employees,
2. Employ, dismiss, promote, transfer, assign and retain employees,
3. Relieve employees from duties because of lack of work or funds under conditions where continuation of such work would be inefficient and non-productive,
4. Maintain the efficiency of District operations,
5. Determine the methods, means, job classifications and personnel by which District operations are to be conducted.
6. Take whatever actions may be necessary to carry out the missions of the District in situations of emergency.
7. Establish the methods and processes by which work is performed.

The Board reserves all other rights, statutory and inherent as provided by state law.

The Board also reserves the right to delegate authority to the Superintendent for the on-going direction of all District programs.

Cross Reference 6110 Superintendent-Board Relations

Legal Reference 20-3-324, MCA Powers and Duties
 39-31-303, MCA Management Rights of Public Employers

Policy History:

Adopted on: 6.13.2016

Revised on:

Park City School District

THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

1520

Board/Staff Communications

Every reasonable means of communication is encouraged throughout the education community. Nevertheless, an organization must maintain some order and structure to promote efficient and effective communications.

Staff Communications to the Board

All official communications or reports to the Board from principals, supervisors, teachers or other staff members shall be submitted through the Superintendent. This shall not deny any staff member's right to appeal to the Board from administrative decisions, provided that the Superintendent shall have been notified of the forthcoming appeal and that it is processed according to the applicable procedures for complaints and grievances.

Board Communications to Staff

All official communications, policies and directives of staff interest and concern will be communicated to staff members through the Superintendent. The Superintendent will employ all such media as are appropriate to keep staff fully informed of the Board's concerns and actions.

Visits to Schools

In accordance with Montana statutes, each trustee shall visit each school of the District not less than once each school fiscal year to examine its condition and needs. Individual Board members interested in visiting schools should, out of courtesy, make arrangements for visitations through the principals of the various schools. Such visits shall be regarded as informal expressions of interest in school affairs and not as "inspections" or visits for supervisory or administrative purposes.

Legal Reference: 20-3-324(21), MCA

Powers and Duties

Policy History:

Adopted on: 6.13.2016

Reviewed on: 2.13.2018

Revised on:

Park City School District

THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

1531

Expenses for Board Members – In-District

A Trustee shall not receive remuneration for service as a Trustee. Trustees living more than three miles from the meeting place shall be entitled to mileage at the rate stipulated in 2-18-503, MCA for each mile of travel from their homes to the meeting place for each meeting of the Board or for any meeting called by the County Superintendent. Reimbursement may be paid as the travel is assumed or may accumulate until the end of the fiscal year, at the discretion of the Trustee.

Expenses for Board Members at Out-of District Meetings

Trustees normally attend workshops, training institutes and conferences at both the state and national level. It is appropriate that Trustee expenditures at these out-of-District meetings be paid by the District. It is the intent of the District to pay all legitimate costs for Trustees to attend out-of-District meetings at the established rates for reimbursement set by the District.

Legal References	2-18-503, MCA	Mileage allowance
	20-1-211, MCA	Expenses for officers attending conventions
	20-3-311, MCA	Trustee travel reimbursement

Policy History:

Adopted on: 6.13.2016

Revised on:

Park City School District

THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

1532

Trustee Insurance

The District shall maintain sufficient insurance to protect the Board and its individual members against liability arising from actions of the Board or its individual members while each is acting on behalf of the District and within the Trustee’s authority.

An additional Trustee, as provided for in 20-3-352(2), who is chosen as a nonvoting chairperson of the board of an elementary district is entitled to all of the immunization, defenses, and indemnifications as described in 20-3-322, MCA.

Legal References: § 20-3-331, MCA Purchase of insurance – self-insurance plan
 § 20-3-332, MCA Personal immunity and liability of trustees
 § 20-3-352(2), MCA Request and determination of number of high school district additional trustee positions – nonvoting trustee

Policy History:

Adopted on: 6.13.2016

Revised on:

Park City School District

THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

1535
Page 1 of 2

Indemnification and Defense of Trustees and Employees

The District shall defend and indemnify each of its current and former Trustees and employees whenever such Trustees or employees are civilly sued for their actions taken within the course and scope of their service to or employment by the Board, as a result of an alleged violation of Article VII, Section 17, of the Montana Constitution, except as otherwise provided herein.

In any noncriminal action brought against any current and former Trustee or employee of the District for a negligent act, error or omission, or other actionable conduct of the Trustee or employee committed while acting within the course and scope of the Trustee's office or employee's employment, resulting in an increase in taxes in violation of Article VII, Section 17, of the Montana Constitution, the District shall, except as otherwise provided herein, defend the action on behalf of the Trustee or employee and indemnify the Trustee or employee. Indemnification shall be provided for any money judgments or legal expenses, including attorney fees either incurred by the Trustee or employee or awarded to the claimant, or both, to which the Trustee may be subject as a result of a suit covered under this policy.

Upon receiving service of a summons and complaint in a noncriminal action against him or her alleging a violation of Article VII, Section 17, of the Montana Constitution, the Trustee or employee shall give written notice to the District, requesting that a defense to the action be provided by the District. Except as otherwise provided herein, the District shall offer a defense to the action on behalf of the Trustee or employee. The defense may consist of a defense provided directly by the District. The District shall notify the Trustee or employee, within 15 days after receipt of notice, whether a direct defense will be provided.

In a noncriminal action in which a Trustee or employee is a party defendant, the Trustee or employee shall not be defended or indemnified by the District for any money judgments or legal expenses, including attorney fees, to which the Trustee or employee may be subject as a result of the suit, if it is determined that:

1. The conduct which the claim is based constitutes oppression, fraud, or malice or for any other reason does not arise out of the course and scope of the Trustee's office or the employee's employment;
2. The conduct of the Trustee or employee constitutes a criminal offense as defined in Title 45, chapters 4 through 7;
3. The Trustee or employee compromised or settled the claim without the consent of the District; or
4. The employee failed or refused to cooperate reasonably in the defense of the case. If no judicial determination has been made applying the exclusions provide herein, the District

may independently determine whether those exclusions apply. However, if there is a dispute as to whether the exclusions herein apply and the District concludes it should clarify its obligation to the Trustee or employee arising under this section by commencing a declaratory judgment action or other legal action, the District shall provide a defense or assume the cost of the defense of the Trustee or employee until judgment is rendered in such action holding that the District had no obligation to defend the Trustee or employee. The District has no obligation to provide a defense to the Trustee or employee in a declaratory judgment action or other legal action brought against the Trustee or employee by the District under this policy.

Policy History:

Adopted on: 8.16.2016

Revised on:

Park City School District

THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

1610

Annual Goals and Objectives

Each year, during the summer months, the Board may receive from and have the opportunity to review, and propose/make adjustments, if desired, to the Park City School's collaboratively established Mission and Vision statements and superintendent-proposed annual objectives.

Additionally, usually during the summer months, the Superintendent shall provide the Board with a report relating to the District's progress in achieving its Mission, Visions and previous year's objectives.

Legal Reference: 10.55.701, ARM Board of Trustees

Policy History:

Adopted on: 6.13.2016

Reviewed on: 2.13.2018

Revised on:

Park City School District

THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

1700
page 1 of 3

Uniform Complaint Procedure

The Board establishes this Uniform Complaint Procedure as a means to address complaints arising within the District. This Uniform Complaint Procedure is intended to be used for all complaints except those involving challenges to educational material and those governed by a collective bargaining agreement, and complaints alleging violations of Title IX or discrimination under Section 504.

Except as noted above, the District requests all individuals to use this complaint procedure, when the individual believes the Board or its employees or agents have violated the individual's rights under: (1) Montana constitutional, statutory, or administrative law; (2) United States constitutional, statutory, or regulatory law; or (3) Board policy.

The District will endeavor to respond to and resolve complaints without resorting to this formal complaint procedure and, when a complaint is filed, to address the complaint promptly and equitably. The right of a person to prompt and equitable resolution of a complaint filed hereunder will not be impaired by a person's pursuit of other remedies. Use of this complaint procedure is not a prerequisite to pursuit of other remedies, and use of this complaint procedure does not extend any filing deadline related to pursuit of other remedies.

The Superintendent has the authority to contract with an independent investigator at any time during the complaint procedure process. Within fifteen (15) calendar days of the Superintendent's receipt of the independent investigator's report and recommendation, the Superintendent will respond to the complaint and take such administrative steps as the Superintendent deems appropriate and necessary.

Level 1: Informal

An individual with a complaint is first encouraged to discuss it with the appropriate teacher, counselor, or building administrator, with the objective of resolving the matter promptly and informally. An exception is that a complaint of sexual harassment should be discussed directly with an administrator not involved in the alleged harassment.

Level 2: Building Administrator

When a complaint has not been or cannot be resolved at Level 1, an individual may file a signed and dated written complaint stating: (1) the nature of the complaint; (2) a description of the event or incident giving rise to the complaint, including any school personnel involved; and (3) the remedy or resolution requested. This written complaint must be filed within thirty (30)

calendar days of the event or incident or from the date an individual could reasonably become aware of such event or incident.

When a complaint alleges violation of Board policy or procedure, the building administrator will investigate and attempt to resolve the complaint. The administrator will respond in writing to the complaint, within thirty (30) calendar days of the administrator's receipt of the complaint.

If either the complainant or the person against whom the complaint is filed is dissatisfied with the administrator's decision, either may request, in writing, that the Superintendent review the administrator's decision. (See Level 3.) This request must be submitted to the Superintendent within fifteen (15) calendar days of the administrator's decision.

Level 3: Superintendent

If either the complainant or the person against whom the complaint is filed appeals the administrator's decision provided for in Level 2, the Superintendent will review the complaint and the administrator's decision. The Superintendent will respond in writing to the appeal, within thirty (30) calendar days of the Superintendent's receipt of the written appeal. In responding to the appeal, the Superintendent may: (1) meet with the parties involved in the complaint; (2) conduct a separate or supplementary investigation; (3) engage an outside investigator or other District employees to assist with the appeal; and/or (4) take other steps appropriate or helpful in resolving the complaint.

If either the complainant or the person against whom the complaint is filed is dissatisfied with the Superintendent's decision, either may request, in writing, that the Board consider an appeal of the Superintendent's decision. (See Level 4.) This request must be submitted in writing to the Superintendent, within fifteen (15) calendar days of the Superintendent's written response to the complaint, for transmission to the Board.

Level 4: The Board

Upon written appeal, the Board will consider the Superintendent's decision in Level 2 or 3. Upon receipt of written request for appeal, the Chair will either: (1) place the appeal on the agenda of a regular or special Board meeting; or (2) appoint an appeals panel of not less than three (3) trustees to hear the appeal and make a recommendation to the Board. If the Chair appoints a panel to consider the appeal, the panel will meet to consider the appeal and then make written recommendation to the full Board. The Board will report its decision on the appeal, in writing, to all parties, within thirty (30) calendar days of the Board meeting at which the Board considered the appeal or the recommendation of the panel. A decision of the Board is final, unless it is appealed pursuant to Montana law within the period provided by law.

Level 5: County Superintendent

When a matter falls within the jurisdiction of a county superintendent of schools, the decision of the Board may be appealed to the county superintendent by filing written appeal within thirty (30) calendar days of the Board's decision, pursuant to Montana law.

Legal Reference: Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (Civil Rights Act)
Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990
§ 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973

Policy History:

Adopted on: 6.13.2016

Reviewed on: 2.13.2018

Revised on:

For the complete policies of Park City School District, please visit:

https://core-docs.s3.amazonaws.com/documents/asset/uploaded_file/1647169/park_city_school_district_no._5_policy_manual-july_2019.pdf

APPENDIX C
Advisory Board Structure

MONTANA CONNECTIONS ACADEMY

ADVISORY BOARD STRUCTURE

Proposed School Launch: August 2024

Purpose

The Park City School Board, in their role of governing Montana Connections Academy (“Board”), is committed to its role of promoting the mission of the School, setting policy and cultivating the school’s long-term strategic plans. In order to achieve these goals, the Board welcomes input and cooperation from Board-appointed individuals with unique skill sets, history with the school and/or Board, and specific expertise that can assist the Board in its oversight of the school. Therefore, the Board is establishing an Advisory Board of Directors for the purpose of allowing valued contributors the opportunity to provide recommendations and insight regarding the public charter school's operations.

Policy

The Advisory Board is a recognized group of individuals, appointed by resolution of the Board, who are periodically asked to contribute to discussions and/or activities of the Board, based on the Board’s wish to receive their perspective on a matter. Advisory Panel member(s) do not vote on any matter of the Board, and their opinions are non-binding; all participation is strictly at the request of the Board. As such, Advisory Panel members are not subject to fiduciary or other legal requirements of Board members, though are expected to maintain similar ethical and moral standards.

Membership

At the discretion of the Board, individuals may be appointed by majority vote to serve on the Advisory Board. Each Advisory Board member will serve until either the Board or the Advisory Board member request removal. Members of the Advisory Board must include individuals with knowledge or experience in the mission or focus of Montana Connections Academy.

Responsibilities

The Advisory Board is a governance function supported by the school’s leadership team and it is anticipated that the school leader will have significant input into their work and composition. The Advisory Board’s primary responsibility is to provide expertise and recommendations on the operations of Montana Connections Academy.

Some responsibilities of the Advisory Board include but are not limited to:

1. Work with the school leader and Pearson Virtual Schools to effect best practices in regards to school operations.
2. Work with the school leader to provide periodic updates to the full Board on the status of projects and subject matter where the Advisory Board is involved.
3. Report to the Board at regular Board meetings following any Advisory Board meeting.

APPENDIX D
Startup & Operational Budget
Statement of Cash Flows

Montana Connections Academy - Startup and 5 Year Budget
Revenue and Expense Statement

School Years 2025-2029

	Startup Budget	2024-2025 Budget	2025-2026 Budget	2026-2027 Budget	2027-2028 Budget	2028-2029 Budget
Enrollment		505	960	1,280	1,485	1,630
ANB		490	930	1,239	1,437	1,577
Revenues						
Basic Entitlement		424,542	456,716	479,040	499,581	515,605
Per ANB Entitlement		2,789,170	5,517,720	7,557,698	8,935,991	10,007,290
Special Education Allowable Costs		74,710	144,633	196,542	232,510	260,266
Indian Education for All		12,069	23,594	32,115	37,992	42,527
Data for Achievement		11,554	22,590	30,752	36,380	40,722
E-Rate		-	2,000	2,700	3,500	3,800
Pearson Virtual Schools Start Up Grant	146,430	-	-	-	-	-
Total Revenue	146,430	3,312,045	6,167,253	8,298,848	9,745,953	10,870,211
Expenses						
Compensation Expense						
Salaries - Administration	67,750	306,000	428,480	478,466	492,820	631,410
Benefits - Administration	16,260	73,440	102,835	114,832	118,277	151,539
Taxes - Administration	5,420	24,480	34,278	38,277	39,426	50,513
Subtotal Administration Expense	89,430	403,920	565,594	631,575	650,522	833,462
Salaries - Teachers	-	956,238	1,814,007	2,593,608	2,866,847	3,229,192
Benefits - Teachers	-	229,497	435,362	622,466	688,043	775,006
Taxes - Teachers	-	76,499	145,121	207,489	229,348	258,335
Subtotal Teachers Expense	-	1,262,234	2,394,489	3,423,562	3,784,238	4,262,533
Total Compensation Expense	89,430	1,666,154	2,960,082	4,055,137	4,434,761	5,095,995
Purchased Services						
Student Instructional Materials and Technology	-	973,428	2,085,127	2,753,868	3,485,437	3,779,834
Student Support (Includes Special Ed)	-	112,356	240,671	317,859	402,299	436,279
Instructional and Staff Support Services	-	51,099	109,457	144,562	182,965	198,420
Administrative, Business and Other Support	-	143,666	307,739	406,436	514,407	557,856
Facilities and Other Program Expenses	-	7,095	15,197	20,071	25,403	27,548
Total Purchased Services	-	1,287,643	2,758,191	3,642,797	4,610,511	4,999,937
Operating Expenses						
Testing and Assessments	-	251,995	479,040	638,720	741,015	813,370
Employee Related	-	21,427	40,733	54,310	63,009	69,161
Facilities	17,000	68,175	129,600	172,800	200,475	220,050
Capital Expenditures	25,000	120,000	-	-	-	-
ISP	-	11,571	21,996	29,328	34,025	37,347
Student Related	-	23,659	44,976	59,968	69,572	76,366
Professional Services	15,000	14,054	26,717	35,622	41,328	45,363
Total Operating Expenses	57,000	258,886	264,022	352,029	408,408	448,287
Governance Expense						
Authorizer Oversight Fee	-	99,361	184,958	248,884	292,274	325,992
Total Governance Expenses	-	99,361	184,958	248,884	292,274	325,992
Total Expense	146,430	3,312,045	6,167,253	8,298,848	9,745,953	10,870,211
Net	-	-	-	-	-	-
Beginning fund balance	-	-	-	-	-	-
Ending fund balance	-	-	-	-	-	-

**Montana Connections Academy
Operational Statement of Cash Flows**

	<u>Year 1 of Operation Budget</u>
Managed Enrollments	
Enrollment	505
ANB	490
Cash Flows from Operating Activities	
Change in Net Assets	\$ -
Depreciation	\$ 17,000
(Increase)Decrease in receivables	\$ -
(Increase)Decrease in prepaids	\$ (8,000)
Increase (Decrease) in unearned revenue	\$ -
Increase (Decrease) in accrued payroll	\$ 52,593
Net Cash Provided by Operating Activities	\$ 61,593
Cash & Cash Equivalentents - Beginning	\$ -
Cash & Cash Equivalentents - Ending	\$ 61,593

APPENDIX E
School Handbook: General Portion



School Handbook

General Portion

2023-2024

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Welcome to your Connections Academy Virtual School!

Your school is designed for students to learn at the highest levels possible. Our rigorous curriculum, personalized learning approach, and engaging virtual classroom sessions make learning challenging and relevant. Our student-centered approach means each child receives the educational support they need to succeed. Whether it's one-on-one discussions with our highly trained team of professionals focused on your student's well-being; virtual sessions using LiveLesson® session technology; supplementary educational opportunities; clubs and activities; or our rigorous, standards-based curriculum, everything your school provides revolves around ensuring student success.

Your school's dedicated teachers and administration are focused on your student's well-being and fulfilling the Connections Academy mission: *to help each student maximize their potential and meet the highest performance standards through a uniquely individualized learning program.*

Parents/guardians (Caretakers), your role in a Connections Academy school is unique in public education. You are a true partner in your student's education and have unprecedented access to your student's teachers and other school personnel. You must also ensure that you and your student comply with all school policies outlined in this Handbook and in the School-Specific Handbook Supplement. Sections in this Handbook marked with an asterisk (*) have additional information in the Supplement. Please read both these documents carefully and contact your school or Connections Academy Customer Care with any questions you have. To reach your Connections Academy school, visit www.connectionsacademy.com, enter your zip code, and then select Visit School Site. Learning Coaches and Caretakers can see detailed school contact information from their Pearson Online Classroom® login page. The way you log in and the functionality of the system will remain the same. Your School-Specific Handbook Supplement, found in the Virtual Library in Pearson Online Classroom (formerly known as Connexus), also contains complete school information. To contact the Connections Academy central office, call 800-382-6010, or send an email to support@pearsononlineclassroom.com.

Congratulations on joining the Connections Academy family. Together, we can ensure your student has a safe and successful experience at your Connections Academy school.

We look forward to working with you and wish you a successful academic year!

Getting Ready

Quick Tips

Get to Know Connections Academy Policies

Please take some time before the school year starts to understand the policies in this General Handbook and your School-Specific Handbook Supplement. You and your student are bound by the policies in these documents, so please refer to these handbooks throughout the year to ensure you and your student are compliant with Connections Academy policies and procedures.

Getting Ready for the School Year

Learning Coaches and students should check their To Do list on their home page in Pearson Online Classroom every school day. **Be sure to complete the assigned orientations and trainings** you find there; this will help ensure that you and your student get off to a great start for the school year.

Setting up your student's "learning area":


1. Dedicate a space for keeping school materials and supplies organized
2. Place your student's "classroom" in a quiet area that is free of distractions
3. Create a filing system for portfolio assessments, student work, and important papers
4. Create a showcase area to display your student's work
5. Review your calendar, set a schedule, and post the daily routine

If you're waiting for a computer delivery from Connections Academy, review the set-up requirements and make sure everything you need is in place, including broadband internet service, so when your computer arrives, you are ready to go. Please note that you can access assignments and complete work in Pearson Online Classroom without receiving your materials first. If you are using your own computer, take time to review the system requirements in Pearson Online Classroom Help (accessed via the **MORE** tab on the Toolbar) to ensure you are set up properly. As soon as you are enrolled and set up with your internet access, you can get started with your schoolwork!

Learning Coaches can prepare for their role by exploring the many family support resources Connections Academy offers. From the Home Page, select the Links tab, then select Learning Coach Central. Here you'll find a "Getting Started Checklist," a link to the "Prepare for Success" website, announcements about LiveLesson sessions designed to help Learning Coaches support their students adjust to virtual learning, and much more!

Need Help?

Our Pearson Online Classroom Help has a lot of answers! Select the **MORE** tab on your toolbar in Pearson Online Classroom and then select the Help button. You can also call Connections Academy at 800-382-6010 or send a WebMail message to Technical Support if you have any issues with your computer, Pearson Online Classroom, or accessing the internet.

If you want to get to know your teacher(s), check out the Teacher Communication Data View. To access this Data View, select your student's name from your Home Page. From there, you will see the courses your student is taking. Select the  icon beside the teacher's name and then select and view the teacher's Teacher Communication Data View information. Review the teacher's prior experience and qualifications, courses taught, contact information, and more!

Important Resource Links

[Privacy Policy](#)

[Terms of Use](#)

[FERPA](#)

[Honor Code K-5](#)

[Honor Code 6-12](#)

Welcome to Connections Academy! We hope you have a great year!

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1 Introduction

This handbook has been approved by each of the Connections Academy schools' Governing Boards and/or their authorizers as required. The most current version of this General Handbook, and its companion document, the School-Specific Handbook Supplement, is available online in the School Handbooks section of the Virtual Library in Pearson Online Classroom.

Sections of the General Handbook that have additional information in the School-Specific Handbook Supplement are denoted by an asterisk (*) in the table of contents. Please be sure to refer to your School-Specific Supplement for additional, school-specific information on these topics. All policies in this General Handbook apply to grades K–12 unless otherwise noted. However, as high school programs vary from state to state, information related to high school is found in the School-Specific Handbook Supplement.

2 School Mission and Overview

2.1 Mission Statement

It is the mission of Connections Academy schools to help each student maximize their potential and meet the highest performance standards through a uniquely individualized learning program. Check your School-Specific Handbook Supplement for your school's individual mission and/or vision statements.

2.2 Program Overview

Connections Academy's high-tech, high-touch, virtual "school without walls," combines the best in virtual education with very real connections among students, families, teachers, and the community. The program combines a first-class curriculum, high-quality teachers, state-of-the-art technology, community connections, and a personalized learning approach that works together to maximize student learning.

2.3 Non-discrimination Statement

Practices that exclude, deny benefits to, or otherwise discriminate against any person on the basis of ethnic group identification/ethnicity, marital status, race, color, national origin, ancestry, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, physical or mental disability, athletic performance, language proficiency in English or another language, prior academic achievement, or age in the admission to, participation in, or receipt of the services under any of the Connections Academy and its affiliated entities educational programs and activities, or in employment practices, or any other area protected under federal or state law are strictly prohibited.

Age limitations may be imposed in response to mandatory state-specific laws and requirements. Your School-Specific Handbook Supplement will have specific information on age enrollment eligibility.

The non-discrimination policy is in accordance with the provisions of Title VII of the *Civil Rights Act of 1964*,

Title IX of the *Educational Amendment of 1972* (Title 9), Section 504 of the *Rehabilitation Act of 1973* (Section 504), the *Age Discrimination Act of 1975*, and the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004* (IDEA). Individuals who are designated to coordinate Connections' compliance with these laws are detailed in the Connections [Non-discrimination Policy](#). Please also review your School-Specific Handbook for state specific Non-discrimination statements as required by state law and/or school authorizers.

Schools are required to adopt and publish grievance procedures providing for prompt and equitable resolution of complaints alleging any action prohibited by state and federal law. See your School-Specific Handbook Supplement for additional information.

2.4 The Connections Academy Commitments*

Each Connections Academy school has high expectations for its students and their families and a commitment to the rigorous educational program implemented is required for success. In return, each Connections Academy school holds itself to high standards and makes the following commitments:

- 1 The school will contact the student and their Caretaker on a regular basis and treat them as valued and respected partners in the common goal of student academic achievement.
- 2 The school will partner with the student and family to provide a Personalized Learning Plan (PLP) to meet the student's individual learning needs.
- 3 The school will provide a quality education program, including curriculum, instructional materials, and a certified, well-trained teaching staff.
- 4 The school will support students and families with the training needed to learn how to use Pearson Online Classroom and provide encouragement needed to fulfill their responsibilities.
- 5 The school will make a strong effort to incorporate all stakeholders' feedback for the continued improvement of the program.
- 6 The school will encourage the student's social interaction with other school students and families by supporting community coordinators and school staff in their efforts to organize various field trips and community events. The school's Get Connected! program will help facilitate these opportunities to connect. Some schools will provide private Facebook groups where Caretakers and Learning Coaches can "meet" to arrange study groups and other informal gatherings.
- 7 For students with disabilities, the school will follow Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) to provide a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). The school will also follow students' Section 504 plan requirements for accommodations to address each eligible student's individual needs as required by law or regulation. See your school's Handbook Supplement for details.
- 8 The school will support Caretakers by providing school records or other required information when seeking to transfer their student to another educational program where proper procedure is followed in accordance with state and federal law.

- 9 The school will comply with the provisions of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). (See the link on page 4 for the Connections Academy FERPA policy.)
- 10 The school will comply with the provisions of the Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act of 1998 (COPPA). (See link on page 4 for the Connections Academy Privacy Policy, including COPPA statement).
- 11 The school will provide approved Caretakers access to student records and related school information through Pearson Online Classroom in accordance with applicable federal and state law.
- 12 The school will always operate in accordance with state and federal law while keeping the best interests of the student in mind.

3 School Organization and Roles

This section provides information about how your school is organized and on the various roles and responsibilities for everyone involved in the school.

3.1 Roles and Responsibilities

Caretaker (Parent or Legal Guardian)

Connections Academy schools apply the term “Caretaker” to the student’s parent(s) and/or legal guardian(s) who enrolls the student and satisfies the student’s enrollment requirements. All Caretakers are automatically given “Learning Coach” (see below) access in Pearson Online Classroom so they can perform the Learning Coach duties. Caretakers must agree to and sign the Parent/Learning Coach Acknowledgement (PLCA) as part of the enrollment process. While Caretakers automatically have Learning Coach access, they may also designate another adult or adults as Learning Coach(es) either *in addition to* or *in place of* the Caretaker by completing and submitting the Designated Learning Coach Agreement form. Even if the Caretaker designates another adult or adults as Learning Coach(es), the Caretaker will continue to have Learning Coach access in Pearson Online Classroom. The Caretaker always has full and final authority for the child’s education and educational decision-making with the school, and therefore must be available to the school staff for discussions related to the student’s educational and other school-related needs.

Learning Coach

The Learning Coach is the adult who performs tasks such as recording attendance, reviewing lessons, providing supervision, and communicating with teachers. Each student will have at least one Learning Coach who is usually the student’s Caretaker. Caretakers may designate another adult or adults as the student’s Learning Coach(es), either in addition to or in place of the Caretaker, for daily oversight of the student’s schoolwork and school-related activities, by completing the Designated Learning Coach Agreement form. As noted, the Caretaker always has full and final authority for the child’s education and educational decision-making with the school, and therefore must be available to the school staff as needed for discussions related to the student’s educational and other school-related needs.

The duties and responsibilities of the Learning Coach are detailed in this Handbook and in the School-Specific Handbook Supplement, so it is important that both Caretakers and Learning Coaches read both documents carefully.

The *Get Coaching! Program* is designed to assist Learning Coaches and Caretakers in understanding and fulfilling their role in their student's education at a Connections Academy school. Through the *Get Coaching! Program*, we provide Learning Coaches and Caretakers with ongoing support, provide access to resources, and facilitate connections with other Learning Coaches. The *Get Coaching! Program* resources are available under Links on the Learning Coach and Caretaker Home Page.

Under certain circumstances, students who are eighteen (18) years of age or older, or an emancipated minor, may request to be their own Learning Coach. To discuss this option, students should contact either the Connections Academy Enrollment Team during the enrollment process, or the School Leader once enrolled.

Student

The student's role in a Connections Academy school is to learn to the best of their abilities. Therefore, students should expect to take age-appropriate individual responsibility for their own learning. This is accomplished by applying themselves to their studies in a focused and serious manner, working hard, becoming engaged in the lessons and activities, asking questions, exploring their personal interests, improving areas of academic weaknesses, and capitalizing on strengths. Students are expected to complete their own work and uphold the principles of the Connections Academy Honor Code.

Eligible Student

An "Eligible student" at Connections refers to students over eighteen (18) years of age and emancipated minors. Other uses of 'eligible student' will be qualified with the area of eligibility; for example, "504-eligible students."

School Leader

This individual is responsible for the administration of the school and ensuring students are provided with the support and assistance they need. The School Leader's title may vary from school to school such as principal or executive director. Check your School-Specific Handbook Supplement for your School Leader's contact information.

Homeroom Teacher (Elementary Students)

Each elementary student is assigned a homeroom teacher (depending on program implementation, a Family Connections Coordinator may provide support in lieu of a homeroom teacher). The homeroom teacher serves as the family's central point of contact at the school and works with students and their Learning Coaches to develop and implement the Personalized Learning Plan (PLP).

Generally, the homeroom teacher will also be the teacher for most or all of the student's subjects. The homeroom teacher is responsible for making instructional decisions such as providing instructional interventions; interacting synchronously with students for instructional purposes; verifying the student's course work; providing timely feedback to students on their academic work; issuing final course grades; reviewing and approving adjustments to students' schedules (such as vacations and/or field trips); and making recommendations regarding promotion and retention to the school leadership.

Homeroom teachers or Family Connections Coordinators may assist with things such as confirming and arranging standardized testing plans (dates, times, locations, etc.) working with Learning Coaches to run the Scheduler (adjusting the student's Planner within Pearson Online Classroom), addressing basic technical concerns, and assisting with the process for marking and/or changing student attendance. The name of the teacher is listed next to each course name on the Pearson Online Classroom home page and in the Grade Book so that students and Learning Coaches can easily identify and contact teachers as needed.

School Counselor, Homeroom Teachers, and Advisory Teacher (Middle & High School Students)

Each middle and high school student has an Advisory Teacher, Homeroom Teacher, and/or School Counselor (titles may vary by school). The Advisory Teacher, Homeroom Teacher, or School Counselor assists students and Learning Coaches with course selection, student transfers, graduation requirements, college and career planning, interpersonal counseling, course placement changes as needed, and general academic guidance.

A School Counselor or other qualified staff member is available to assist with high school credit or college/career questions or to help with post-high-school plans including career, college/university, the military, or the workforce.

Subject Specific Teacher

- The subject-specific teacher is the primary contact for students and Learning Coaches for subject-specific questions. These teachers are responsible for handling the following instructional issues:
- providing timely and relevant feedback on student work, including grading and updating progress reports;
- facilitating instruction using research-based strategies and resources to address skill gaps with a particular assessment or concept;
- managing the course scope, pacing, and sequence to ensure a student's academic success;
- personalizing the curriculum, including modifying lessons and assessments
- proctoring state and/or federally mandated tests.

Subject-specific teachers proactively monitor each student's progress using Pearson Online Classroom and through regular contact via phone, streaming audio and video (LiveLesson sessions), and WebMail messages

(our Pearson Online Classroom-based email system). Subject-specific teachers provide small and large group instruction to their students on key concepts and skills; add, expand, or modify assessments based on the student's demonstrated mastery of the material; assign and score assessments and portfolio items; and provide feedback on the student's performance to the student, Learning Coach, and Family Connections Coordinator, or homeroom/advisory teacher.

Teacher feedback is provided using rubrics, assessment grades, phone conferences, WebMail messages, and LiveLesson sessions. Depending on a student's needs and grade level, subject-specific teachers provide instruction in a variety of ways to address the needs of each student. Subject-specific teachers evaluate students in their corresponding subject area(s), provide instructional resources based on the student's learning needs, prepare student progress reports (at schools that issue them), verify the student's course work, issue final course grades, and make promotion or retention recommendations (for students in grades K–8).

Generally, middle and high school students will have a different subject-specific teacher for each course. Elementary students will have the same subject-specific teacher for most subjects; these teachers may also be the student's homeroom teacher.

Substitute Teachers

Substitute teachers are teachers who meet the state requirements for being substitute teachers in their state. They serve as homeroom and/or subject-specific teachers when the regular Connections Academy teacher is not available for an extended period (on military or medical leave, etc.). Substitute teachers perform all the duties of a teacher or subject-specific teacher.

Teaching Assistants

Teaching assistants may perform many of the duties of a homeroom teacher or subject-specific teacher, as defined above. However, teaching assistants are not permitted to issue final course grades and they must work under the supervision of a certified teacher.

Family Connections Coordinators (FCC)

Depending on program implementation, the Family Connections Coordinator (FCC) serves as a single point of contact between the family and the Connections Academy school to provide support to families and students for non-teaching tasks.

Community Coordinators (Caretaker Volunteers)

Community Coordinators are typically Caretakers of students in the school. Some schools do not have community coordinators and have events planned by the school staff – they are referred to as School Event Representatives. Community Coordinators, and/or School Event Representatives, help create opportunities for community projects, field trips, and group meetings with other students and families. They also serve as a

clearinghouse for information about local extracurricular activities and events. Schools provide information to families at the start of the school year about how to become a Community Coordinator and will distribute the Community Coordinator's contact information to families. If you have a question or a suggestion related to a local activity or opportunity, contact your assigned Community Coordinator or the School Event Representatives.

Student Support Team

The Student Support Team (SST) consists of several individuals with various roles at the school, with the goal of supporting struggling students' academic and behavioral needs. The SST may be comprised of teachers, staff members, administrators, school counselors, intervention specialists, parents as needed, and others at the school who may have knowledge of student performance and needs. The SST meets regularly to discuss individual students referred to the team by school staff or parents. Concerns may be related to academic performance, engagement, or physical and mental health. This team may also go by another name, such as Response to Intervention (RTI) or Student Assistance Team (SAT). Students are identified as needing additional support based on universal screening assessments conducted with all students, teacher and/or Learning Coach observation and knowledge of the student, and/or a review of the student's academic performance, participation, and/or attendance levels documented in Pearson Online Classroom.

The Student Support Team shares information among its members about a students' academic and/or other challenges and makes recommendations for implementation of instructional or other interventions. SST members also perform regular data collection on progress of these interventions, and other relevant information. The team develops and recommends additional instructional strategies and resources for the student's teacher(s), Caretaker, and Learning Coach, and follows up to ensure that these strategies are indeed helping the student make adequate progress and show academic improvement. Caretakers are kept informed regarding interventions and student progress.

3.2 Required Student Safety Trainings for School Staff

Connections Academy takes student safety and well-being very seriously and believes that students should be able to learn in a safe and comfortable environment. Therefore, in addition to the comprehensive set of required courses and trainings for school staff that focus on educational practices, teachers are required to take the following courses that focus specifically on student safety:

- Child Abuse: Identification and Intervention
- Mandatory Reporting
- Child Sexual Abuse Prevention
- Youth Suicide Awareness, Prevention & Postvention
- Online Safety

All members of school staff must complete required trainings at the beginning of the school year and refer to the trainings throughout the year as needed. School leadership tracks completion of these trainings to ensure all staff members have completed them in the required time frame. Caretakers and Learning Coaches are asked to communicate and collaborate with teachers and other school staff as they work to fulfill their professional roles in supporting student safety and well-being. They are asked to involve additional parties as appropriate to address concerns, and to always keep student safety and well-being at the center of the conversation.

3.3 School Information

Contact information for your school is found in the School Specific Handbook Supplement.

3.4 School Schedule

Connections Academy students and/or their Learning Coaches may develop their own schedule to fit their specific needs, both in how they structure each school day and their overall schedule, provided no state or local regulations are violated. However, students must still attend school regularly, meet their school's specific attendance and/or instructional hour requirements, correspond with their teachers, and complete lessons and assessments as expected. (See your School-Specific Handbook Supplement for specific requirements.)

Students must also be available during regular school hours for any required phone conferences or participation in LiveLesson sessions unless school-approved alternate arrangements are made. Most teachers are available only during regular school business hours. Students will be informed of these hours and any individual variations in teacher schedules at the beginning of each course and through the Teacher Communication Data View.

3.4.1 The School Calendar

Your school's calendar is in the School Specific Handbook Supplement.

3.4.2 Required Instructional Hours

This information is in the School Specific Handbook Supplement.

3.4.3 Emergency Closure Plans

Some schools may have a separate Emergency Closure Plan.

If a school's office(s) closes due to an emergency such as hazardous weather conditions, the school will send Caretakers a "Must Read" WebMail message explaining the details of the office closure. The school will also record a voice mail message announcing the details of the office closure and the availability, or lack of availability, of teachers and other school services.

In many instances, Connections Academy Centralized Support Services and teachers are in different areas of the country where weather conditions may be different from those at the local school office. Such services may be occasionally interrupted even when school operations are running as usual, or vice versa.

Even if a school's office(s) or Centralized Support Services closes due to hazardous weather or other emergencies, students should plan to complete lessons and mark their attendance for the day if they are able to work either online or offline, unless otherwise notified by their school.

3.5 Enrollment, Withdrawal, and Transfers

Specific state requirements for enrollment or placement eligibility are available on the Connections Academy website and in your school's specific supplement. To find these requirements, select the Enroll tab at the top of the page, and then select a school in your state from the drop-down menu.

Connections Academy schools abide by all federal, state, and local policies and guidelines for student admission and do not impose admission requirements that are inconsistent with these policies and guidelines.

This includes compliance with the McKinney-Vento Act regarding homeless students, including but not limited to, enrolling homeless students in a timely manner even if the student is unable to produce records normally required for enrollment (e.g., proof of residency or previous academic records), and providing those students with services comparable to services offered to students not experiencing homelessness. The School Leader or their designee shall serve as the liaison for homeless students.

To comply with enrollment caps, state regulations and reporting, and/or testing processes and requirements, some schools may at various times during the school year temporarily "pause" enrollment. This "pause" will hold students who have completed Stage 2 of the enrollment process on a wait list for a defined period. After the "pause" of enrollment is over, students will be able to move forward in the enrollment process. The school board or authorizer has delegated to the School Leader the authority to define and implement these temporary "pauses" of enrollment periods. The "pause" dates will be posted on the school's website.

Some schools have enrollment caps and may implement a lottery system when the cap is reached. Schools may close their enrollment period as permitted by state or local regulations. Check your school's website for more information.

3.5.1 Returning Students

Caretakers that plan to continue their enrolled students with Connections Academy for the next academic year must communicate their plans in the "Tell Us Your Plan" Data View. This is available on the Caretaker's To Do List each year. Caretakers will be provided with detailed information on how to complete these tasks, **which should be completed as soon as the Caretaker knows the student intends to return** the following year

(but no later than the end of the current school year or specific deadline if indicated).

Caretakers of students who have withdrawn from a Connections Academy school but wish to return to the same school for a different school year should contact the Enrollment Department at 800-382-6010 to determine what information is needed to reactivate the student's account.

Students enrolled in a Connections Academy school who wish to enroll in a different Connections Academy school for the next school year, should call the Enrollment Department at 800-382-6010 for instructions and requirements appropriate to their situation.

If a student wishes to return during the same school year to a Connections Academy School after withdrawing, the Caretaker should contact the Enrollment Department at 800-382-6010 to initiate the re-enrollment process. These students should not complete a new online registration. Additional documents may be required for reenrollment. Please see the School-Specific Handbook Supplement for information specific to each school.

3.5.2 Kindergarten and First Grade Admissions

This information is found in your School-Specific Handbook Supplement.

3.5.3 Enrollment after the Start of the School Year or Semester*

Students may generally enroll after the start of the school year if (1) space is available, subject to any other local limitations, and (2) the open enrollment period for the school year has not closed. Students who enroll after the start of the school year or semester will be placed at the appropriate starting point in the curriculum based on work they have already completed, the school's specific enrollment policy, and discussions between the family and the school's teachers and/or school counselor. Participation in a special orientation course for students who enroll after the start of the school year is suggested.

3.5.4 Dual Enrollment in another K-12 Program*

Information pertaining to dual enrollment may be found in the School-Specific Handbook Supplement.

3.5.5 Dual Enrollment in a College or University


Interested students who are academically and socially ready may wish to consider supplementing their Connections Academy curriculum with college-level courses in schools where dual enrollment in a college or university is available. While this option will apply primarily to high school students, some advanced middle school students may also wish to consider this option where permitted. All students should consult with their school counselor or advisory teacher prior to enrolling in college courses to be sure they are fully informed about specific state requirements as well as the benefits and responsibilities of adding one or more college course(s) to their workload.

3.5.6 Withdrawing from School*

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

Prior to withdrawing, the Caretaker and/or Eligible student (in the case of an emancipated minor) should discuss with a school staff member the student's reason(s) for withdrawing. It may be possible to address the concerns and avoid withdrawal. If a student or Caretaker is experiencing a problem with a teacher, they should contact the School Leader, Assistant Principal, or their designee to discuss possible solutions for continued enrollment.

The student's Caretaker and/or Eligible student generally may begin the withdrawal process in two (2) ways; however, some states may only offer one (1) option.

- From the Caretaker home page in Pearson Online Classroom, select the student's  and go to Initiate Student Withdrawal Data View. Complete the Next Schooling information and select Save and Finish to submit the form.

This method should **not** be used to indicate a student does not intend to return for the following year. The Initiate Student Withdrawal Data View will result in the immediate withdrawal of the student for the current year.

- Contact your teacher by phone or WebMail message and inform your teacher of your intent to withdraw your student(s). If you use the WebMail system, be sure to include the date of the student's expected exit from the school, and the name of the qualified educational program that your child will be using instead. You will then be contacted by the school to acknowledge your intent to withdraw your student.

See Section 10, Educational Materials Provided by the School and Technology, for information concerning the return of school equipment and materials as part of the withdrawal process.

3.5.7 Location Change*

Connections Academy defines four types of "Location Change" and has specific policies related to each type. Any time a student initiates a Location Change, the Caretaker must contact the school to discuss the change and ensure the student remains compliant with all Connections Academy, state, local, and other applicable regulations and policies. The four types of Location Change, and the related policies, are listed below:

- Permanent In-Area Location Change: change of residence within the school's service area. Example: The family purchases a new home during the school year. For this type of location change, the Caretaker must:

- » Contact the Connections Academy Enrollment Department to notify them of the location change as soon as possible, but no later than thirty (30) days after the move. The Caretaker must provide new proof of residency documentation and updated student contact information to the Connections Academy Enrollment Department within thirty (30) days of the move. Failure to provide an updated proof of residency may result in withdrawal from the school, as permitted or required by federal, state, or local policies and guidelines for enrollment.
 - » Inform the student's homeroom, or advisory teacher, or Family Connections Coordinator, as appropriate.
 - » Continue to meet the school's eligibility requirements if the student moves within the school's service area.
- Temporary Location Change: Travel or relocation away from student's residence for longer than three (3) weeks. Example: The family stays with a relative in another state for two (2) months. For this type of location change, the Caretaker must contact the School Leader prior to the Location Change for permission to make the Location Change. The School Leader will determine per state requirements if the student can make this Location Change and remain eligible to stay enrolled in the school. Location changes may also affect support services, dependent upon state law.

If the School Leader grants permission for the Location Change, the Caretaker will be required to complete a Location Transfer Request Form available in the Enrollment section of the Virtual Library and submit it to the school. The School Leader or designee will sign the form and provide the Caretaker with a copy of the form. This copy will serve as formal written approval from the School Leader for the student to remain enrolled during the Temporary Location Change.

- » Note: Stationary computer equipment (desktop computers and monitors) may never be taken out of the state for Temporary Location Changes. Laptops, where provided, may move temporarily with the student, if the student remains actively enrolled in the school and updated address and contact information for temporary location has been received by Connections Academy.
- Alternate Learning Location(s) Change: Student learning regularly occurs in an alternate location but there is no change in the student's residence. Example: The student's Learning Coach is a neighbor, and the student regularly works at the Learning Coach's home. For this type of location change, the Caretaker must contact the School Leader prior to the location change to confirm that this Location Change will not affect the student's enrollment eligibility.
 - » If the School Leader grants permission for the Location Change, the Caretaker will be required to complete a Location Transfer Request Form and submit it to the school. The School Leader or designee will sign the form and provide the Caretaker with a copy of the form. This copy will serve as formal written approval from the School Leader for the student to have an alternate learning location or locations. Note: Caretakers are always responsible for Connections provided equipment and materials, regardless of where the materials/equipment are located. See Section 10, Educational Materials Provided by the School, for more information.
 - » In any of the above types of Location Change, the student must continue learning activities, required communications, and must still comply with all state testing and other state and school requirements.
 - Permanent Out-of-Area Location Change: Move to another state.

If a student moves out of state, all computer equipment and curriculum materials must be returned to Connections Academy, even if there is another Connections Academy school that operates in the state where the student is moving.

The following actions related to Location Change may cause the student to be immediately withdrawn from the school:

- engaging in any type of Location Change without notifying the School Leader and/or the Connections Academy Enrollment Department team.
- failure to complete and submit the required Location Change forms.
- failure to provide the Connections Academy Enrollment Department team and/or the school with any additional required documentation.
- failure to receive specific written permission to remain enrolled when engaging in any form of Location Change.

If a family moves to another state where there is a Connections Academy school and the family would like to enroll in that school, the Caretaker should contact the Connections Academy Enrollment team as soon as the Caretaker knows when and where the family is moving. The student will need to be withdrawn from the current school and enrolled in the new school, if eligible for enrollment in the new school. Eligibility requirements may differ between the schools, and some states provide different rules for members of the military, so it is important that the family contacts the Connections Academy Enrollment team as soon as possible to determine if the student is eligible to enroll in the new Connections Academy school. The Caretaker should also notify the school that the student is moving.

While Connections Academy will do its best to accommodate students wishing to enroll in another Connections Academy school, this enrollment cannot be guaranteed. Each school is governed by state-specific enrollment rules and procedures, and Connections Academy must comply with these rules and procedures (e.g., the school in the new state may have an enrollment cap that has already been met and/or may have a waiting list.)

Note: For students with an IEP, the family is encouraged to contact the Special Education Director in the new Connections Academy school prior to enrollment to discuss the special education services provided in the new school.

3.5.8 Learning Environments and Working with Multiple Students

It is essential that the Learning Coach designated to support students in the Connections Academy virtual school environment fully understand their responsibilities and can perform them as required. Additionally, if the group learning environment requires the transfer of Connections Academy equipment or materials, Caretakers must complete the Location Transfer Request Form (as described in the Location Change section in this handbook) and be granted permission to move materials/equipment.

3.6 Assessment

It is essential that student performance is regularly assessed. Your school uses the following types of assessments to determine students' skill levels, to evaluate performance, assign educational plans, and to develop a permanent school record.

3.6.1 Pre-testing, Mid-testing, and Post-testing to Measure Academic Progress

At the beginning, middle, and end of each academic year, the school may administer formative assessments or other evaluation tools as pre-, mid-, and post-assessments to students in grades K–12. These assessments provide instructional guidance for teachers and Learning Coaches, help teachers to construct and implement the Personalized Learning Plan (PLP), and measure the student's academic gains over the year.

Exempting Alternate Assessment Students from Formative Assessment Participation

If a student's IEP designates alternative state testing and alternative curriculum, the student is exempt from mandatory Pre-testing, Mid-testing, and Post-testing. However, at the Learning Coach's request, the student may still complete the testing and receive scores as these assessments can be a useful diagnostic tool.

3.6.2 Assessments within the Curriculum

As students progress through their courses, they will engage in many different types of formal and informal assessments. All assessment types are listed below, though not all courses or grade levels will have all these assessment types. Some assessment types count more heavily towards the student's final course grade than others. For example, the grade a student earns on a Unit Test or Portfolio has a bigger impact on the student's final grade than a Quiz. (Assessments are listed in alphabetical order.)

Weighted Assessments

Discussion: Discussion assessments are found in grades 3-12 and allow students in the same section to communicate with each other during a semester; each student's contribution to the discussion is graded by the teacher based on the discussion rubric. The discussion window remains open throughout the semester. After the semester closes, students must send WebMail messages directly to their teachers to reply to discussion posts.

Draft Assessments: Draft assessments allow teachers to monitor students' work as it progresses. For example, students may be required to submit rough drafts or other precursor components of portfolio items to their teacher.

Final exam*: Final exams test students on their course knowledge acquired during a semester. Final exams contain multiple question types and are embedded with lesson content.

Participation: Typically, participation accounts for five percent (5%) of a student's overall grade. Some

courses may contain participation assessments in which students document their participation in an activity, such as Time to Talk or a LiveLesson session; in these instances, participation may account for greater than five percent (5%). Whether to include participation in the student's grade, and the requirements to earn full participation credit for a course, are determined by each Connections Academy school.

Portfolio: A portfolio is an assessment type that requires students to submit documentation (e.g., essays, presentations, reports, graphic organizers) to their teachers electronically through the Drop Box or via physical mail**. Students in grades 9-12 are expected to submit their portfolios through the Drop Box. Portfolio items are reviewed and graded by the teacher.

Most portfolios include a rubric designed to help the student understand the expectations for this lesson. Note: Not all courses use these conventions.

Practice for AP® Exam*: This assessment appears in some Advancement Placement courses as preparation for the AP® Exam. It features multiple choice questions and practice writing opportunities. Students receive immediate feedback to guide their review study.

Pretest*: Pretests, typically contains 10-15 multiple choice questions, assess students' prior knowledge of a subject, and are customized based on the skills addressed. The questions are automatically scored and do not include content requiring teacher review or grading. Pretests align to the unit objectives, and they assess the major skills and concepts for that unit.

Quick Check*: Quick checks are non-cumulative assessments added to the end of some lessons in grades 1-12. Quick checks for most middle and high school courses as well as some elementary courses are graded and weighted.

Quick Checks are brief (usually 3–5 multiple choice questions), and the questions are automatically scored and do not include content requiring teacher review or grading.

Quiz*: Quizzes, which typically contain 5-10 questions, are longer than Quick Checks and cover material from more than one lesson. Though some questions may require teacher grading, most quiz questions are automatically scored. Quizzes are not in all courses.

Sample Work: Sample work assessments allow teachers to monitor students' work samples as they progress. The requirements of a sample work submission vary by course and teacher. For example, Algebra 1 teachers may select specific assignment samples and request them from their students.

Unit Test*: Unit tests cover material from all lessons in a specific unit. Unit tests are longer than quizzes, contain a variety of question types, and are weighted more heavily than quizzes toward a student's final grade.

Some questions on a unit test may require teacher grading.

*This assessment type must be completed in one sitting. Students cannot answer some questions, save their work, and return later to complete the remaining portion of the assessment.

** Some schools require all grades to submit portfolios electronically via Drop Box only. Please see the School-Specific Handbook Supplement for additional information.

Non-Weighted Assessments

The following assessment types are also found in the curriculum, but do not have an impact on the student's grade.

Course Survey: Course surveys are non-graded assessments that ask students for their opinions regarding a course and their teacher. Surveys are usually placed at the end of a course and may be linked through the student's list of Data Views.

Online Practice*: Online practice assessments allow students to answer practice questions for a specific lesson or unit so they can measure their own grasp of a subject or concept. The questions are automatically scored, and do not contain content that requires teacher review or grading. These assessments are scored but do not impact a student's final grade and may occur several times in a unit. These assessments often offer targeted feedback to the student, visible in the review guidelines after the assessment has been submitted.

Reflection*: Reflection assessments are used in math courses to get students thinking about their relationship with mathematical concepts from a unit (or preceding units) and about themselves as learners and mathematicians. These assessments contain mainly multiple-choice questions, but they may also contain short answer questions. Reflections are scored but do not impact students' final grades.

Skills Check*: These are brief assessments used to gauge students' learning in kindergarten through second grade. The Learning Coach completes these diagnostic assessments to keep the teacher updated on the student's progress. Skills checks are also used in many high school math courses as a diagnostic assessment completed by the student prior to embarking on a new lesson. Skills checks are scored but do not impact a student's final grade.

*This assessment type must be completed in one sitting. Students cannot answer some questions, save their work, and return to complete the remaining portion of the assessment later.

Informal Evaluations

Informal evaluations are tools used to gauge the student's level of mastery of the material. These evaluations are not included in the student's grade but provide valuable feedback to teachers and Learning Coaches about

the student's areas of strength and areas needing additional support or intervention.

- **Check for Understanding:** Questions for students provided by the school to the Learning Coaches to gauge the development of certain skills.
- **Curriculum-Based Assessment (CBA)** - Synchronous or real-time communications between the student and the teacher used to gather formative information on students' understanding of concepts. Students are required to participate in a minimum of eight (8) CBAs a year, but teachers often administer many more. Teachers conduct two types of CBAs: verified curriculum-based assessment (VCBA) and diagnostic curriculum-based assessment (DCBA).
 - » VCBA's are used to confirm student comprehension of concepts previously assessed and graded as successfully completed with scores of B or higher.
 - » VCBA's are informal phone conversations or individual LiveLesson sessions with the student in which the teacher asks a variety of questions about recently completed assignments to verify the student has done the work independently and the student has grasped the key components of the lesson(s). The content to be covered is not specified ahead of time, other than being part of "recently completed assignments" such as a reading passage or solving a set of mathematics problems.
 - » DCBA's are used to identify specific skill or concept issues students are having, develop strategies for remediation, and determine if future instructional support is necessary to help underperforming students achieve success. These occur during regularly scheduled phone calls and are targeted toward students who receive a C or lower on an assessment or have an overall GPA of less than B.

3.6.3 Mandatory Testing

Public schools are required by state and federal law to administer state standardized tests to students in specific grades or courses. Additionally, Connections Academy schools require all students to participate in at least one proctored test each year, which will usually be the state-mandated test. Therefore, all students enrolled in a Connections Academy virtual public school will be required to participate in the state standardized testing program, consistent with state law.

The school will work closely with Caretakers, Learning Coaches, and students as they prepare for required testing. If a student is not able to participate in testing, the Caretaker will be required to document the reason(s) for nonparticipation, and the student may be required by the school to take a makeup test.

There are serious consequences for both the school and the student when students do not participate in state testing. Therefore, students who fail to participate in required testing may be subject to disciplinary action consistent with state law.

3.7 Personalized Learning

3.7.1 The Personalized Learning Process

Connections Academy teachers work with Learning Coaches and students to customize student learning experiences based on specific academic needs, learning pace, learning styles, and personal interests. This

program personalization is an ongoing process that also includes the creation of a written plan (the Personalized Learning Plan, or PLP) that all members of the learning team follow.

The personalization process includes the following components: initial academic placement and course selection, performance testing, review of student work samples, detailed phone conferences, goal-setting, adjustment of student schedules and lesson pacing, lesson modifications and/or enrollment in instructional intervention programs, attendance in LiveLesson sessions, enrollment in elective courses, and strategies for families to implement throughout the year. The process also includes several goal-review and adjustment sessions including a final conference at the end of the school year to review progress.

3.7.2 Adding Elective Courses (Elementary and Middle School)*

Before requesting to register for electives, students in grades K through 8 must generally meet the following criteria:

- be enrolled in school for at least thirty (30) days.
- have completed their initial assessments (e.g., MAP, Renaissance 360, iReady or other pretesting, and/or state testing).
- be in good academic standing (overall grade of 70% or higher).
- maintain acceptable attendance (i.e., be “On Track”).
- have all start-up tasks complete, including completion of student orientation courses and Welcome Call (start of school year call with teacher).

Schools may define additional criteria for permitting students to enroll in electives. After these criteria are met, teachers will work with families to select appropriate electives, approve the student’s selection, and enroll the student in the elective course(s).

*Some states permit electives to be selected at other times. All criteria noted above are subject to state laws and/or regulations. Please see the School-Specific Handbook Supplement for additional information.

3.7.3 How Families Can Personalize Instruction

Students and Learning Coaches work closely with their teachers to personalize student programs, but families can also personalize their learning programs in several different ways.

- Pacing and Scheduling — Subject to requirements including, but not limited to, the required days of attendance and/or hours of instruction required and other applicable state or local regulations, the school allows students and their Learning Coaches to structure the school day to best meet the student’s learning needs. The online Scheduler allows students in grades K–8 and their Learning Coaches to select which days of the week they would like to schedule certain courses and how many lessons of each subject per day they plan to complete. This flexibility accommodates different learning styles and needs; however, the personalization of pacing and scheduling must not impact

the overall amount of work that is required of each student, which is determined exclusively by state requirements and is overseen by the school's leadership.

Most high school students have significantly decreased flexibility in their schedule so they can learn and work together (e.g., in discussions and on collaborative projects). High school students who may benefit from a more flexible schedule should speak with their advisory teacher, Family Connections Coordinator, or school counselor to make appropriate adjustments.

- **Limits to Program Flexibility** - Every student is expected to master the essential skills and standards covered by the school's rigorous curriculum, which is designed to meet or exceed each state's standards. Families may work with teachers to adjust pacing and assigned lessons for each student; however, it is imperative that students participate fully in the school's standards-based curriculum and complete the lessons and assessments assigned by the teacher(s).

3.7.4 Placement Changes during the School Year (Elementary and Middle School)*

Counselors, administrators, teachers, School Leaders, and the Connections Academy staff work together to make sure each student's initial course placement is accurate and appropriate. Although it is possible to request a change in placement after the student is enrolled, Connections Academy recommends that before requesting a placement change, students work in their assigned courses, look ahead in the curriculum for the year, and discuss with the school any specific challenges the student is having with the course work and/or grade level placement. The student's teacher may also be able to tailor the current curriculum to better meet the student's individual needs.

To request a placement change, the Learning Coach should contact the student's teacher. The School Leader or their designee will have final say in approving or disapproving placement changes.

*Please see the School-Specific Handbook Supplement for information on the High School Add/Drop process.

3.8 Course Completion*

Course completion definitions may vary by state but are critically important when requesting either midyear course completion or late course completion options (below).

3.8.1 Midyear Course Completion (Elementary and Middle School)

Before requesting to move on to the next course or level, students should work with their Learning Coaches and teachers to make sure they have mastered course content. Teachers can provide enrichment and extension activities for students to reach greater depth in their studies. Electives may also be available for students who have completed a required or core course prior to the end of the school year.

The decision to advance to a new level of a subject or subjects mid-semester or midyear will be made collaboratively by the Caretaker, Learning Coach, teacher, school counselor (if applicable) and School Leader.

Students may be eligible for a mid-semester or midyear placement change if they can demonstrate the following outcomes:

- mastery of current course content;
- exploration of enrichment and extension opportunities offered throughout the curriculum;
- sufficient in-depth involvement with the course material as determined by the teacher.

The teacher will review these criteria to determine the student's eligibility for a placement change. If the student is deemed eligible, the teacher will request the placement change on behalf of the student. Generally, if a midyear curriculum promotion occurs, the student's final grade level will remain the same. As with other placement changes, the School Leader will have final say in approving or disapproving placement changes.

Note: All schools have a deadline for shipping materials that occurs in the spring semester. After the deadline, placement changes that require shipped materials are no longer available to students. Teachers will notify Caretakers if placement change requests cannot be completed for this reason.

3.8.2 Late Course Completion

Students who require extended time to complete assessments after the school year has ended should check with their school for allowable permissions for assessment completion. If there are extenuating circumstances, students may request an extension to submit work up to two (2) weeks after their school's last official day of classes. There is no guarantee that an extension will be granted.

Extensions will not be granted beyond two (2) weeks after the last official day of school. Extensions will not be considered for the purpose of accelerating course studies over the summer. Unless a school operates an official summer school program (or the student qualifies for extended school year services through their special education services), additional services or materials will not be provided for learning activities over the summer. For students with an IEP, Extended School Year (ESY) services are determined by the student's IEP team.

4 Attendance

Students in this virtual public school program have no physical classrooms but still must meet all regulatory requirements for attending public schools in their respective state. These requirements are documented in the School-Specific Handbook Supplement, but generally include attending school for a required number of days and/or completing a required number of instructional hours. Caretakers and students are jointly responsible for ensuring students meet their school's attendance requirements and that attendance is properly documented as required by the school (see the Attendance section of your School-Specific Handbook Supplement). School authorities are responsible for enforcing attendance laws. Students not attending school as mandated by law will be considered truant.

Although there is more flexibility in the Connections Academy program than in a traditional school setting regarding instructional time, students are still expected to follow the school calendar. Specific school calendars and the required days and hours of instruction are posted in the School-Specific Handbook Supplement.

4.1 Caretaker and Learning Coach Responsibilities for Attendance

All Grade Levels: State laws require that Caretakers take responsibility for ensuring their student(s) attends school. Most Connections Academy programs require the Caretaker or designated Learning Coach record attendance daily. (Refer to your School-Specific Handbook Supplement for details on attendance recording requirements.) The Learning Coach Orientation includes information on how to record attendance. In addition, all students must complete assigned lessons and submit specified assessments to their teachers. Attendance should be equated to work completion. If the student does not complete assigned lessons, then attendance hours should not be marked by the Caretaker or designated Learning Coach. Students and/or their Caretakers and/or Learning Coaches must also participate in/respond to regular telephone, WebMail message, and/or Web conferencing (LiveLesson presentations) contacts, as well as in-person contacts (if required) with a teacher during the school's regularly scheduled school hours.

Elementary and Middle School: Grades K–8 (not all grades may be available at every school): To meet attendance requirements and successfully complete their lessons, students in elementary and middle school will need assistance from a Learning Coach. The student's need for assistance will range from substantial assistance to relatively minor assistance and will vary depending on the student's age, ability to be self-directed, and to comprehend the materials. In addition, students must be in a safe and secure environment, which generally requires the student have adult supervision during the entire school day to meet health and safety regulations. Check your state's laws to determine the age when a child can be left unattended.

High School (Grades 9–12; may not be available at all schools): Students are expected to perform their schoolwork independently. However, where attendance is required to be reported, the Learning Coach must still report daily attendance in Pearson Online Classroom and verify that the student has completed the assigned lessons and assessments. The Learning Coach is also expected to be available for regular teacher conferences. While students may not need adult supervision during the school day, they must still be in a safe and secure environment. Check your state's laws to determine the age when a student can be left unattended.

4.2 Marking and Verifying Attendance

Recording, Verifying, and Changing Attendance Records in Pearson Online Classroom

Learning Coaches are expected to record attendance in Pearson Online Classroom at least weekly; at some schools, Learning Coaches are required to record attendance daily. Be sure to follow your school's requirements for recording attendance to avoid the risk of having your student in Alarm status and/or in danger of being considered truant.

After the Learning Coach has entered and saved attendance in Pearson Online Classroom, attendance cannot be edited. If the Learning Coach makes an error marking attendance, they must contact the student's teacher to request an attendance record change. Before the school can change the attendance record in response to a Learning Coach request, they may be required to demonstrate the original entry was an error and provide documentation to support the change. Because attendance is subject to "lockdown" (see below) at certain intervals, Learning Coaches should contact their student's teacher as soon as they discover they have made an error in recording attendance. Attendance recorded by a Learning Coach is not sufficient to properly verify student attendance. Teachers also verify attendance records on a regular basis and may change a student's attendance status if there is insufficient evidence to verify attendance, and/or if they are unable to determine if a student was participating in learning. In reviewing attendance documentation, teachers must determine that each student has met or exceeded the required amount of instructional time stipulated by each state's regulations. The School-Specific Handbook Supplement outlines how many learning hours or minutes must be demonstrated within a specific time frame.

Teachers may make changes to attendance records for the following reasons:

- Upon request by a Learning Coach to record Attendance - If requested to do so by the Learning Coach, teachers may enter the appropriate attendance code in a blank attendance field because the Learning Coach is not able to access a computer or does not have Internet access, but the student has been able to continue their studies using offline materials. Teachers will note in the student's Log the reason for the Learning Coach's request and may request additional documentation that the student was engaged in learning. This method of recording attendance should only be done in exceptional circumstances.
- Upon request by a Learning Coach to correct an error - If a Learning Coach makes an error entering an attendance code, a request may be made for the teacher to enter the correct code. Teachers will note the basis for the request in the student's Log and may request additional documentation.
- Upon review by a teacher or other authorized school staff to validate attendance - A teacher or authorized school staff member will change the number of hours worked to a "0," or the "present" code may be changed to an excused or unexcused absence code, if, after communication with the Learning Coach and/or a review of the student's activity in Pearson Online Classroom, the teacher or staff member believes there is insufficient evidence to support that the student was in attendance (e.g., insufficient lesson completion, teacher contact, and/or assessment completion, including state test attendance).

In all cases, a teacher or another school staff member will discuss with the Learning Coach any perceived differences between the student's recorded attendance and their documented completed lessons and assessments submitted. If the teacher or other school staff member makes any changes to the student's attendance record in Pearson Online Classroom, they will promptly inform the Learning Coach and document the change in the student's Log. Learning Coaches who have disputes related to attendance should contact the School Leader to resolve the dispute, then follow the dispute resolution procedures in the School-Specific Handbook Supplement if the issue is not resolved with the School Leader.

Attendance Lockdown

Schools are required to regularly report attendance records to their respective state education agencies. To ensure that reports are accurate, student attendance records are “locked down;” at set intervals so records can only be modified by authorized school personnel. Lockdown generally occurs every two weeks (meaning any dates that are fifteen (15) or more days in the past can only be edited by authorized school personnel), but some schools have defined dates.

After attendance records have been locked down, teachers are not able to make changes to them. Therefore, Learning Coaches should request to update attendance records as soon as they realize the error. To request alterations to a “locked down” attendance record, Learning Coaches should contact their student’s teacher, but be aware the teacher must discuss the attendance alterations with the appropriate authorized school personnel.

The School Day

Students must complete a certain number of instructional hours per day as required by the authorizer and state law and regulations. Learning Coaches should check the Attendance section in their School-Specific Handbook Supplement for specific information about the school’s required daily and weekly hours of attendance. The school day is not limited to certain hours for start and end times, however the school’s teaching staff is only available during the school’s hours of operation. Learning Coaches must also be available for their scheduled phone conferences during these times.

The School Calendar

Each school operates according to a set school calendar, which includes days when teachers will not be available due to professional development (all other Support Services are available during these days), and days when the school is completely closed (no Support Services are available during these days). Student learning may continue during any days when the school is closed. (Refer to the School-Specific Handbook Supplement for your school’s calendar, and information on how to record attendance per specific state rules.) All work must be completed as of the last day of school, except as provided in the Late Course Completion section of this handbook. School work that is not completed as of the last day will receive an incomplete or failing grade.

Types of Absences

Specific attendance rules and regulations regarding different types of absences vary by school. Reasons for excused absences may include, but are not limited to, the following:

Health problems- Students are unable to participate in schoolwork due to physical or mental health problems. If a student misses more than three (3) consecutive school days, the Learning Coach or Caretaker must send

a written note or WebMail message to the student's teacher(s) documenting the health issue. The school may also require a doctor's note for absences of more than three (3) consecutive days.

Other excused absences- Examples of other excused absences include a family illness that requires the absence of the student, a death in the immediate family, religious holidays, family trips that can be taken only during the normal school calendar year (see the section below on extended absences), court appearances requiring the student's attendance, attendance at special events of educational value approved by a teacher, and other special circumstances that show good cause. These absences must be approved in advance by the school's leader. If requested or required, families should expect to provide appropriate documentation to support an absence.

During an excused absence, the student is still responsible for completing all required lessons and assessments for the school term.

Unexcused absences- Absences that are not approved by the school will be considered unexcused. In some states, students may be withdrawn from school for truancy if they have excessive unexcused absences. See your School-Specific Handbook Supplement Attendance section for details.

Extended Absences

If a Learning Coach is aware their student is going to be unable to complete their learning activities for more than three (3) consecutive school days, they should contact the teacher as soon as possible to inform them of the planned absence and discuss a plan to ensure the student stays on track to complete the school year successfully. The school may request documentation of the reason(s) for the planned absence.

Varying the School Holiday Schedule

If families wish to work during the school's designated holiday period(s) and take an equivalent number of vacation days at another time, they should contact their teacher(s) for approval at least one (1) week prior to the requested change. Teachers and school administrators will consider factors such as mandatory school events (testing, etc.) and the school's attendance regulations when reviewing such requests. Caretakers will be notified if the request can be granted. If the request is allowed, teachers will help the family adjust learning schedules, as appropriate, to ensure proper attendance and compliance with state regulations. Some states do not allow school hours to be recorded on weekends or school holidays. Please check with your teacher and be sure to read your School-Specific Handbook Supplement's attendance section before considering this option.

4.3 Escalation Status

Connections Academy Learning Coaches are required to use Pearson Online Classroom to regularly mark hours or days of attendance and/or document lesson completion. Attendance and participation in Connections Academy schools goes beyond daily hours spent on schoolwork and includes other criteria such as contact

with the teacher and the student's rate of lesson and/or assessment completion. If a required component of school attendance and/or participation is not being met, Pearson Online Classroom will trigger what Connections calls "escalation." Escalation is an indicator to the student, Learning Coach, Caretaker, and teacher that the student is not compliant with school requirements. Every student is always assigned one of four (4) escalation status levels in Pearson Online Classroom to monitor progress:

- On Track
- Approaching Alarm
- Alarm
- Exempt*

Students *meeting or exceeding* the minimum requirements for their state will show "On Track" status. Students *not meeting* the minimum requirements for their state are placed into an escalated "Approaching Alarm" or "Alarm" status. When students are in "Approaching Alarm" or "Alarm" status, teachers will notify the Learning Coach and Caretaker of their concerns, help the family understand why the student is in that status, and make every effort to work with the student and Caretaker to ensure the student returns to "On Track" status as soon as possible. Learning Coaches and Caretakers can, at any time, select the Approaching Alarm or Alarm status link, located in the Escalation column on the Learning Coach home page, for details about the student's escalation status.

Students who are in "Alarm" status for an extended time may face disciplinary actions as permitted and/or required by state law, including referral to appropriate agencies for truancy. See your School-Specific Handbook Supplement for details on attendance requirements, truancy, and the escalation system.

*Exempt status is rarely used and generally only for students with serious illnesses or other major but temporary circumstances that prevents them from completing work in a timely manner, or who are expected to catch up and return to "On Track" status prior to the end of the school year. Some students may have modifications specified in an approved IEP or Section 504 plan that dictate exempt status.

4.4 Truancy

Students who fail to meet legal attendance requirements, which may include reported attendance, required contact with teachers, submission of assessments, and documentation of lesson completion shall be considered truant. The school may institute truancy proceedings or otherwise report the student to the appropriate authorities, including courts, as is consistent with state law. Please check your School-Specific Handbook Supplement for truancy policies.

5 Grading and Student Evaluation

Students are evaluated based on several types of assessments, such as quizzes, tests, portfolios, and discussions as described in *Section 3.6.2 Assessments within the Curriculum*. Teachers and substitute teachers are responsible for grading students' work. Only the teacher or substitute teacher can issue the final grade for the course.

The Grade Book and Progress Reports

The Pearson Online Classroom Grade Book allows all Caretakers and/or Learning Coaches and upper-level students (students in grades three and above) to view grades from both electronic assessments (immediate and automatic postings) and written work (posted by teachers after work is evaluated). The Pearson Online Classroom Grade Book is available to Learning Coaches and upper-level students 24 hours a day, seven days a week (excluding regularly scheduled maintenance as noted in *Section 10.2.1 Use of Pearson Online Classroom*) and always reflects the student's status in each course in which they are enrolled (overall grade, grade in each course, grades on assessments within each course, and the number and percentage of lessons the student has completed).

Some schools provide Progress Reports that are snapshots of students' Grade Book during a certain time (e.g., the first quarter of the school year) which may include teacher feedback and comments. For those schools, Progress Reports are created and posted at certain times per year based on a schedule set by those schools which use them.

Grading Timelines

Most assessments, other than portfolio assessments, should be graded by the teacher within two (2) school days. Generally, portfolio assessments will be graded by the teacher within five (5) school days of receipt and the grade posted to the Grade Book. Specific grading schedules and portfolio expectations are initially explained in the Welcome Call and are posted on teachers' Message Boards and in student planners.

5.1 Placement, Promotion, and Retention (Elementary and Middle School)

Placement

During the Connections Academy enrollment process, the student's Caretaker is asked to submit academic documentation for the student that includes the student's most recent academic progress. This information is reviewed and verified by the Academic Placement team; the school counselor, the manager of special education, and/or the School Leader, who collaborates to determine the most appropriate course placement for the student. Students may be requested to complete a skills assessment to determine mastery of previously completed coursework and readiness for Connections Academy curriculum.

Caretakers will review and confirm their agreement to course placement prior to students starting their

coursework. Through this process, Connections Academy may make a decision regarding placement that may differ from the student's prior placement; however, for students with an IEP, placement will be in accordance with the student's IEP.

Promotion/Retention of Returning Students

Near the end of the school year, teachers make recommendations to their School Leader regarding promotion or retention for their students in grades K through 8. These recommendations are based on the following student performance information:

- successful completion of language arts and math courses (based on school's grading scale)
- performance across all courses
- lesson completion across all courses
- attendance
- proficiency levels on assessments, including state testing

Generally, for third grade students to be promoted to fourth grade, they must also demonstrate proficiency in reading.

Decisions about retaining students due to inadequate progress or lack of proficiency will be made on a case-by-case basis, and in accordance with applicable state regulations, by the School Leader. School staff will contact the Caretaker of students in danger of retention in early spring and will discuss the options available to best suit the individual student's needs. It is possible a student may be retained at the end of the school year though not apparently in danger of retention in early spring. The school will make every effort to ensure the Caretaker is aware of this as soon as possible.

Teachers, school administrators, and School Leaders review and discuss the recommendation to make a final decision about promotion/retention for each student.

Some states and authorizers may have specific regulations or school specific policies regarding the promotion and retention of students. Therefore, if there are any discrepancies between the above-listed criteria and state regulations, state regulations will be followed.

Please see the School-Specific Handbook Supplement for more information.

High School Coursework Completed in Middle School

Students in middle school who are academically ready to take high school courses may do so with appropriate approval but should be aware that issuing high school credit is determined by local and/or state regulations. Furthermore, some states may require students to pass End of Course exams to receive credit for the course and/or to graduate. Please see your School-Specific Handbook Supplement - High School Programs and

Policies section, and/or contact your school if you are interested in this option.

6 High School Programs and Policies

Please refer to your School-Specific Handbook Supplement for complete high school policies.

Placement

During the Connections Academy high school enrollment process, the Caretaker may be asked to submit academic documentation that provides a record of school credits earned and attempted, and any courses in progress. The Academic Placement team and the school counselor use the documentation to determine remaining courses needed. Initial course placement will be based on high school credits earned and aligned with state graduation requirements, typical course sequences, and post-secondary goals established by the student during the enrollment process.

Caretakers review and confirm their agreement to course placement prior to the student starting coursework. Through this process, Connections Academy may make a decision regarding placement that may differ from the student's prior placement; however, for students with an IEP, placement will be in accordance with the student's IEP.

High School Credit

Only high school-level classes provide high school credit toward graduation (unless required by a student's IEP team in states where permitted). A student in grade 9, 10, 11, or 12 who is taking courses from the K–8 curriculum can meet attendance requirements but will not receive credits toward graduation for K–8 courses. In some cases, students who are dually enrolled with a college or university may also earn high school credits for those courses. Check with the school counselor or the School-Specific Handbook Supplement for state-specific information.

7 Services for Special Populations

7.1 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Eligible Students*

The school complies with the requirements outlined in the IDEA as well as state special education regulations and statutes to provide a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) to students who have a qualifying disability under the IDEA. In general, this includes (but is not limited to) identifying and evaluating the needs of students with disabilities under the IDEA, developing and revising Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), determining appropriate placements in the least restrictive environment for students with IEPs, implementing IEPs in the appropriate placement determined by the IEP team, considering continued eligibility for special education and related services, and developing and implementing transition plans to prepare for post-secondary transition after high school.

When a student initially enrolls in Connections Academy with an existing IEP, the school either implements the IEP as written or provides the student with comparable services until a new IEP is developed or amended by the IEP team, unless specifically stated otherwise in the School-Specific Handbook. Specially designed instruction for students with IEPs is most often delivered in LiveLesson sessions. In the virtual environment, FAPE is provided in the LiveLesson classroom and includes instruction from a special education teacher. Related services are commonly provided in the virtual environment according to students' needs in order to provide FAPE. It is important for students receiving special education and related services to attend these sessions designed to address their IEP goals.

Connections Academy schools comply with the requirements of the National Instructional Materials Accessibility Standard (NIMAS). As of August 2006, federal law requires publishers of K-12 curriculum to provide a digital version of textbooks and other related materials. The IDEA established the format of these digital versions as the NIMAS. The NIMAS applies to printed textbooks and related printed core materials that are written and published primarily for use in elementary and secondary schools and are required by Connections Education LLC for use by students. Students eligible to receive specialized formats produced by NIMAS files include students who are (a) blind (a visual acuity of 20/200 or less in the better eye after correction or fields less than 20 degrees), (b) visually impaired (a visual impairment with corrections and regardless of optical measurement that prevents the student from reading standard print), (c) physically disabled (a physical limitation that prevents the student from reading standard print), and (d) print disabled (having a reading disability resulting from an organic dysfunction and of sufficient severity that it prevents the student from reading printed materials).

The IEP team determines the instructional program, modifications, and accommodations needed for students with disabilities, including the need for accessible instructional materials and assistive technology. In accordance with legal requirements, accessible formats and assistive technology will be provided to students who need alternative access with these accommodations documented in an IEP or Section 504 plan.

7.2 Rehabilitation Act of 1973: Section 504 Eligible Students*

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (the "Act") is a federal statute designed to prohibit discrimination and to ensure that disabled students have educational opportunities and benefits comparable to those of non-disabled students. A "Section 504-Eligible Student" is a student who either (a) has, (b) has a record of having, or (c) is regarded as having, a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits a major life activity such as learning, self-care, walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, working, and performing manual tasks. Section 504 plans are typically written for students who are disabled as defined in Section 504 of the Act, and who require accommodations and modifications to their instructional program (which may include services and/or assistive technology) but who do not require specialized instruction to receive FAPE.

When a student enters Connections Academy with a Section 504 plan developed by their previous school, Connections Academy will review the plan and supporting documentation and comply with Section 504 of the Act. The Section 504 team will adopt and implement the plan as is or propose a revision to the plan if appropriate, due to the nature of the virtual setting. Connections Academy requires staff members to be cognizant of the needs of Section 504 students and to ensure that students receive appropriate accommodations. Students with Section 504 plans will have periodic review of their plans and needs through Section 504 team meetings.

7.3 English Learners (EL)/Emergent Bilinguals (EB)*

Federal and state regulations require that schools determine students' "primary or home language" and take "appropriate action to overcome language barriers that impede equal participation by [their] students in [their] instructional programs." To meet this requirement, Connections Academy asks Caretakers to complete a primary home language survey based on the regulations of the state in which they reside. Responses are reviewed to identify all students with primary or home language is not English. Connections Academy schools will administer English Language Proficiency assessments to determine students' language acquisition levels in compliance with federal and/or state law and to determine students' language acquisition levels.

Children receive a planned instructional program of English as a second language (ESL) instruction at their developmental and instructional level to facilitate the acquisition of English language skills. This instruction is provided by each school's certified EL/EB teacher with frequency determined by students' language proficiency levels. This may include consultation with the Learning Coach, teacher modification of content lessons and/or assessments, and direct instruction via LiveLesson sessions pursuant to state requirements. Services that promote language acquisition include instructional support to help EL/EB students attain proficiency in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Students with limited English proficiency receive individualized attention that facilitates fluency in English and is based on the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) framework. The proficiency of EL/EB students is assessed annually using state-specific instruments. Students who are exited from EL/EB programming enter a monitoring phase.

7.4 Gifted Students

Students may be identified as gifted during the initial placement process or after enrollment. Students are identified as gifted based on past performance and additional evidence as requested by the school's gifted program staff. Course placement and recommendation is completed through consultation with the Learning Coach.

Gifted students may be placed in special gifted math, science, and language arts courses in grades 3-8 and in Honors or Advanced Placement courses in high school. Students may also be assigned to above grade level courses or given accelerated course work. In some states, gifted students may also receive a Gifted IEP or

other regulatory designation that may have specific requirements. See your School-Specific Handbook Supplement for additional information.

Note: Gifted Language Arts (grades 3-8) and Gifted Literature Study (for grades 3-5 as part of the English/Language Arts gifted program) use a shared inquiry model taught through LiveLesson sessions. Students in this program may be required to attend LiveLesson sessions at certain times and dates. Please check with your child's school for details before enrolling in this program.

8 Non-Curricular Activities

8.1 Clubs and Activities

The clubs and activities program offers students the opportunity to interact with other Connections Academy school and Pearson Online Academy students, regardless of geographic location.

Participation in clubs and/or activities is voluntary and does not impact a student's GPA. Please review the "Clubs & Activities" section located in the Virtual Library for more information.

Eligibility

Not all students are eligible to register in the clubs and activities program since some states impose a maximum age to enroll in a public school. Students must be enrolled at a Connections Academy school for fourteen (14) days to be eligible to register with the clubs and activities program. There is no minimum GPA requirement, nor is there a limit to how many clubs a student may enroll in.

Students eighteen (18) years of age and older are not eligible to register in the clubs and activities program; however, students that turn eighteen (18) after the school year commences may continue with their current clubs and activities until the end of the school year.

The Connections Academy Honor Code and Code of Conduct applies to all clubs and activities. Students who engage in prohibited or unacceptable behavior, such as cheating or bullying and/or harassment of other students, may be removed from the program.

Please review the "Clubs & Activities Expectations" document in the Virtual Library for further information on expectations and rules.

9 Community Events, Trips, and Activities

Connections Academy strongly encourages families to get together for events, trips, study sessions, and other activities. The activities may have educational and/or socialization benefits for students and are generally organized by volunteers. Volunteers organizing events may have different titles by school, including Community Coordinators, Family Involvement Coordinators, or School Event Representatives.

Sanctioned Events vs. Non-sanctioned Events - Certain field trips are sanctioned events, sponsored by the school; others are non-sanctioned events that do not involve the school.

Information Sharing - Volunteers gather and share information (i.e., school's community message board, Facebook group messages, invitations sent via WebMail message, or other communications channels) about events, activities, services, performances, and other opportunities that might benefit students and families. This is strictly the opinion of the volunteer or other families sharing the information, and the school bears no responsibility or liability for its accuracy or usefulness. Furthermore, any use of this information, or participation in an event or activity, is at the sole discretion of each individual Caretaker.

Caretaker Responsibility for Students at Events - Caretakers assume responsibility for their safety and the safety of their student(s). The Caretaker agrees to supervise their student(s) and any other minor children in their charge. The school assumes no liability for anyone who attends an event based on information included on the school's community message board. When school staff is present, they will be responsible, in conjunction with the Caretaker, for general supervision of students and will prioritize student safety.

Special Arrangements - Volunteers may work to develop relationships with local schools, districts, and other providers of activities (e.g., the local Boys & Girls Club), as appropriate, to arrange opportunities for student participation and access to activities.

Sanctioned Events

Sanctioned events shall have educational and/or social value and must be preapproved by the School Leader or designee. A volunteer will have all adults in attendance sign the Connections Academy Sanctioned Waiver, Release, and Event Permission Form at the official event. Caretakers should complete the Media Consent and Release Data View for each student prior to attending the event. If the adult supervising the student at a sanctioned event is not the Caretaker, they must provide the community coordinator or school event representative with a signed, written note from the Caretaker confirming the designated adult has permission to supervise the student at the sanctioned event and is authorized to execute the Connections Academy Waiver, Release, and Event Permission Form as an agent of the Caretaker.

In most states, and in accordance with state or local policies, a sanctioned event may be considered part of the school day upon approval from the School Leader or their designee. **Please consult your School-Specific Handbook Supplement for more information.**

After approval is granted, Caretakers may record the number of hours spent at the sanctioned event as attendance. Any schoolwork scheduled on an "event" day must still be completed. It is not necessary for students to complete lessons on days when they attend sanctioned events, therefore, lessons may need to be completed before and/or after the event to remain on track.

Sanctioned events are posted on the school's message board as "sticky" threads, which are those threads noted in green on the Message Boards. Overnight official events require special approval, and background checks on all adults and chaperones may be conducted as allowable or required by state law. Many schools require Caretakers RSVP in advance for sanctioned events. This allows the school to send an adequate number of staff to the event and for the school to know planned attendance in case of event cancellation.

Note: There may be additional fees charged in order to attend these activities, as permitted by state law.

Non-Sanctioned Events

Non-sanctioned events have not been approved by the school and will *not* be counted as a school day. Non-sanctioned events may be posted on the school's Message Board but not as "sticky" threads.

Families participating in both sanctioned and non-sanctioned events do so voluntarily and assume and accept all risks associated with their participation. Families participating in these events agree to release and hold harmless the school, its affiliates, directors, officers, staff members, agents, and volunteers from any and all liability in the event of an accident or incident in route to, during, and returning from, which is related to, arises out of, or is in any way connected with the non-sanctioned event. The school will not accept financial responsibility for any necessary emergency care and/or transportation for anyone attending a non-sanctioned event.

10 Conduct, Due Process, and Communication

Connections Academy strictly prohibits any form of bullying/cyber bullying, harassment, hazing, or any other similarly destructive behaviors toward any member of the school community, by any member of the school community, in any school environment or at any school activity. Caretakers and/or Learning Coaches who believe they or their student(s) may have been subjected to inappropriate behavior by anyone affiliated with their school should immediately contact the school leadership or the Connections Academy main support line at 800-382-6010 to report any concerns. See the related Sections of the School-Specific Handbook Supplement.

Caretakers and Learning Coaches, as well as students, are expected to abide by the Prohibited Behaviors policy in Section 9.2 of the School-Specific Handbook Supplement, and any other sections covering appropriate conduct and communication. Caretakers or Learning Coaches who engage in any prohibited behaviors, directed toward any member of the school community, may, as disciplinary action, have their access to Pearson Online Classroom suspended or terminated at the discretion of the School Leader. Suspension or termination of Pearson Online Classroom access is the equivalent of being suspended or removed from the school premises and all school activities. Therefore, Caretakers or Learning Coaches whose Pearson Online Classroom access has been suspended or terminated will not be permitted to contact school

staff at school, home, or other locations; to visit school premises; or attend field trips or other school activities, until the disciplinary issue has been resolved and their Pearson Online Classroom access is restored. All communications with the school must therefore be conducted through the student, or through another responsible Caretaker or Learning Coach.

The suspension or termination of a Caretaker or Learning Coach's access to Pearson Online Classroom will impact Connection's Academy's ability to partner with the Caretaker/Learning Coach to meet the student's learning needs. If needed, the Caretaker or Learning Coach who has been suspended or terminated from accessing Pearson Online Classroom may appoint another adult as the student's Designated Learning Coach by completing the Designated Learning Coach Agreement form prior to the termination of the account. The Learning Coach or Caretaker will be notified via WebMail message of the impending suspension or termination of an account and will be given until the end of the next school day to complete the Designated Learning Coach Agreement form.

The Caretaker whose Pearson Online Classroom access has been suspended or terminated may appeal this suspension to the school's Board, where applicable, in writing by sending an email or letter to the school Board president. Only written appeals will be considered. Board contact information can be found on the school's website. If the school does not have a board, the Caretaker or Learning Coach should contact the Director of Schools in writing (see the School-Specific Handbook Supplement for grievance policy).

The school community includes but is not limited to teachers, administration, staff, Caretakers/Learning Coaches, students, volunteers, and school vendors.

10.1 Drug, Alcohol, and Tobacco-Free School

Connections Academy is a drug-free, alcohol-free, and tobacco-free environment. The use of controlled substances, alcohol, and/or tobacco is prohibited at all face-to-face school events and activities including, but not limited to, field trips, testing, and graduation ceremonies. This applies to all members of the school community including students and their families, teachers, staff, and visitors.

The use of tobacco, including smoking tobacco, chewing tobacco, e-cigarettes, snuff, or the possession of or use of any of the following by any member of the school community while on school premises or at a school event or activity as described above, will be considered a violation of this policy:

- Alcoholic beverage(s).
- Illegal, controlled and/or dangerous substances (unless prescribed by a physician for medical purposes and properly documented), or substances purported to be such. Examples include, but are not limited to, narcotics, amphetamines, marijuana, cocaine, heroin, hallucinogens, barbiturates, prescription or non-prescription drugs of any nature and medications such as diet pills, caffeine pills, bath salts, and others.

- Drug paraphernalia.

It shall also be a violation of this policy for any member of the school community to sell, distribute, or attempt to sell or distribute, tobacco products; e-cigarettes; drugs or drug paraphernalia; illegal, dangerous or controlled substances, or any substances purported to be such (synthetics), while on school property or at school events or activities.

If a Connections Academy student attends a school event or activity under the influence of or in possession of an illegal, dangerous or controlled substance, alcohol, tobacco products or e-cigarettes their Caretaker/legal guardian will be notified. In these circumstances, Caretakers will be required to arrange for immediate removal of the student from the school event or activity.

Any non-student member of the school community who attends a school event or activity under the influence of or in possession of alcohol or illegal, dangerous, or controlled substances or substance purported to be such will be asked to remove themselves from the premises. Local authorities including law enforcement may be notified at the discretion of the School Leader or their designee depending on the nature of the violation. Any non-student member of the school community who attends a school event or activity and uses tobacco products or e-cigarettes will be informed of the school's tobacco-free policy for a first violation. If more than one violation occurs, further action may be taken by the school.

If a student is found to be engaged in communications arranging for the sale or exchange of alcohol or illegal, dangerous, or controlled substances or any substances purported to be such at a school event or activity, the student will be removed, and the school will contact both the student's Caretaker and reported to local authorities.

Any other member of the school community found to be engaged in communications arranging for the sale or exchange of alcohol or illegal, dangerous, or controlled substances or any substances purported to be such at a school event or activity will be removed and reported to local authorities.

Students who fail to comply with this drug-free, alcohol-free, and tobacco-free policy will be subject to disciplinary action in accordance with the School-Specific Handbook Supplement disciplinary policies. All other school community members in violation of this policy will be asked to leave the event or activity and/or will be reported to local authorities.

In all cases, this policy will be implemented in accordance with any applicable state laws. See your School-Specific Handbook Supplement for additional information.

10.2 Bullying, Harassment, Sexual Harassment, and other Prohibited Behaviors*

Please refer to your School-Specific Handbook Supplement for your school's policy.

10.3 Discipline and Due Process for Students

Appropriate conduct is expected of all students at the school. Students are guaranteed due process of law as required by the 14th Amendment of the United States Constitution.

10.4 Academic Honesty*

The school regards academic honesty as key to its mission and essential in the virtual environment. Students in all grade levels (K through 12) and their Caretakers are required to review the Honor Code at the beginning of each school year and indicate their agreement to abide by it. Teachers will discuss the Honor Code and its meaning with their students and Caretakers at the beginning of the year. It is expected that all students will adhere to the Honor Code throughout the year and all schoolwork submitted to meet course or class requirements represents the original work of the student.

In addition, students are expected to be proactive in ensuring they are adhering to the principles of academic honesty by:

- completing, and reviewing as needed, the Academic Honesty section of their Orientation.
- agreeing to, and referring to as needed, the Connections Academy Honor Code.
- using tools provided in Pearson Online Classroom to 'self-check' for academic honesty (e.g. plagiarism-checking software), in accordance with their school policy.

Any form of academic dishonesty will cause a student to be subject to disciplinary action. The following principles are critical to maintaining academic honesty:

- Students must not submit work of any kind that is not their own.
- Students must not plagiarize in any work (written, multimedia, oral, creative, etc.).
- Students must not solicit answers or post assessments, assignments, answers to assessments or assignments, or any other Connections Academy curricular materials on any media including social media or social sharing websites that can be seen by other students or other third parties, unless specifically instructed do so as part of the curriculum (e.g. a discussion assessment).
- Students must not give or receive unauthorized assistance on assessments.
- Learning Coaches must not give assistance on assessments.
- Students must not present any forged document or signature to the school.
- Learning Coaches must not present any forged document or signature to the school.

Completing School Assessments

When completing assessments on the computer or on paper, students and Learning Coaches should follow these simple guidelines to ensure that assessments are meaningful, worthwhile, and completed in accordance with the principles of academic honesty:

- Students should complete all assessments independently, and without assistance from their Learning Coach, any other persons, or any external resources. If any support is required of the Learning Coach, the assessment instructions will clearly indicate this.
- Assessments are “closed-book.” They should be completed without the support of any outside resources such as textbooks, workbooks, lesson plans, dictionaries, the internet, or the student’s Learning Coach or any other individuals. In the rare instances where assessments are not closed-book, the instructions will clearly specify that the student may use supporting materials. If you have any questions about what may or may not be appropriate for use during an assessment, contact your teacher.
- Skills Checks (in the lower grades) should be completed by the Learning Coach. These short assessments provide an opportunity for the Learning Coach to share with the teacher their observations about the student’s progress.
- It is never appropriate for students or Learning Coaches to share with anyone, in any format, the contents of any Connections Academy assessments.

10.5 Grievance Procedures for Caretakers*

Please see your School-Specific Handbook Supplement for your school Grievance policy.

10.6 Communication

10.6.1 Communication Systems

Pearson Online Classroom contains several unique and efficient mechanisms for families and school staff to communicate with one other. Pearson Online Classroom is a closed system; therefore, no communication can be made to or from anybody outside of the system. Caretakers control what, if any, of their student’s information is posted and accessible to others in the School Directory. To set or modify these options, Caretakers access their student’s SIF (Student Information Form) - School Directory Data View to adjust their student’s permissions at any time.

The following communications systems are described in detail in Pearson Online Classroom Help.

- School Directory
- WebMail messages
- Message Boards
- Virtual Library
- Teacher feedback on assessments
- Home Page Announcements
- LiveLesson Sessions
- Pearson Online Classroom “Feedback” link
- StarTrack Rating System

The Directory includes names of students enrolled in other Connections Academy schools (in other states and locations), and therefore the student’s information would be available in the Directory to students and Learning

Coaches in other Connections Academy schools. Caretakers may restrict access to Directory Information during the enrollment process. See the Third-Party Access to Student Information section, below, for more details.

In situations where a student, Caretaker, and/or Learning Coach is hearing impaired, that individual may request alternative/additional methods or tools for communicating with teachers and other Connections school staff outside of Pearson Online Classroom (e.g., text messaging).

Caretakers and/or Learning Coaches should contact the school to discuss their situation and must request approval to use alternative communication methods or tools to ensure the communication method and/or tool is secure and appropriate. If the request is approved, the Connections Tech Support team will assist the Caretaker and/or Learning Coach with setting up the tool and confirm with the school. When so authorized, and when used in accordance with the terms agreed upon by the school and the Caretaker/Learning Coach, the use of the alternative/additional communication method(s) and/or tool(s) will not be considered a violation of the Pearson Online Classroom Terms of Use policy.

Connections Academy reserves the right to disallow and/or disable the use of the authorized alternative/additional communication tool(s) at any time if Connections deems the tool(s) is being used inappropriately and/or not in accordance with the agreement between the Caretaker/Learning Coach and the school.

Learning Coaches, teachers, and students are advised that all messaging communication is archived and available for review by Connections at any time.

External Video and Web Conferencing Services

Schools may use external video and web conferencing services and tools (e.g., Zoom). Students are expected to comply with all school policies and the Honor Code when utilizing external services and tools.

10.6.2 Communication Requirements

Both students and Learning Coaches are required to have regular synchronous communications with their teachers. Acceptable types of communication - and whether the contact is more often with the student or the Learning Coach - vary among the grade levels and by school.

Student and Teacher Communication

Connections Academy expects that most students will have daily contact with their teachers through a combination of phone calls, WebMail messages, LiveLesson sessions, face-to-face interaction, and the daily review of assessments via the electronic Grade Book. At a minimum, all students will interact synchronously (e.g., via phone, LiveLesson session, or face-to-face) with a teacher every two weeks so the teacher is able to

monitor academic progress and verify student learning. Note that some schools require additional contact; check your School-Specific Handbook Supplement for details.

10.7 Student Information Access

10.7.1 Collection and Release of Student Information by the School (FERPA)*

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) is a federal law that gives parents/legal guardians (referred to as “Caretakers” by Connections Academy) and students over eighteen (18) years of age, attending a post-secondary institution, and/or emancipated minors (Eligible Students) certain rights regarding the student’s educational records. These rights include the ability to review and correct educational records and the protection of a student’s educational records and “personally identifiable information” from unauthorized disclosure. See also the Release of Student Information and Educational Records to Third Parties below.

FERPA rights are extended to both the Caretaker and noncustodial parent/guardian **unless** the school is provided with a judicial court order (custody order, protective order etc.), state statute, or legally binding document that specifically revokes or restricts a noncustodial parent’s/guardian’s FERPA rights. If a state law and/or enforceable court order provides the noncustodial parent/guardian’s greater or more restrictive access than provided for by FERPA, that state law and/or court order will be followed.

Other statutes protecting students include the Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment (“PPRA”) (See Appendix 2, Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment Policy) and the Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act of 1998 (“COPPA”) (See link on page 4, Privacy Policy), as well as state law in the state in which the student is enrolled.

10.7.2 Parental Access to Teacher Qualification Information*

Families have access to basic background information about their school’s teachers. This information, found in Pearson Online Classroom through the teacher’s Teacher Profile Data View, includes teacher qualifications, experience, and photos. Please reach out to your School Leader for additional information.

10.7.3 Third Party Access to Student Information

FERPA provisions allow the school to disclose certain student information to third parties, such as other schools, without the prior written consent of the Caretaker or Eligible Student. This occurs in two situations: Directory Information and situations in which FERPA permits the school to release educational records without consent (see below). All other disclosure of student information to third parties requires the written consent of the Caretaker or Eligible Student.

Release of Educational Records without Consent: Directory Information

The school may release Directory Information (defined by Connections Academy as student name, state of residence, student telephone number, and student grade level) to third parties as permitted by FERPA.

If the Caretaker or Eligible Student does not wish to have Directory Information released to third parties, they may prevent the release of this information by indicating so in the FERPA Directory Information section of the Student Information Form. If families do not select, the school may, without additional permission, disclose the Directory Information to third parties as permitted by FERPA.

Release of Education Records without Consent: Legitimate Educational Interest

The school may provide a student's educational records to third parties in certain situations listed under FERPA. Examples include the transfer of educational records to the student's new school upon request from the new school, and the provision of educational records to school officials who possess a 'legitimate educational interest' in the student's records, and the provision of educational records to contracted parties providing special education related services. For more information on exceptions to the prior written consent rule, see the link on page 4.

Release of Student Records with Consent

Except for that information which FERPA and/or applicable state law or court order allows the school to release without consent, as noted above, the school must obtain written consent from the Caretaker or Eligible Student prior to releasing any educational record or personally identifiable information to any third party. Consent to release this information must be made in writing, signed by the Caretaker or Eligible Student, and include the following information:

- A specific description of the information or record(s) to be released.
- The party or agency to which the information will be released and their address.
- The signature of the requestor, and the date of the request.

For more detailed information on FERPA, please see the link on page 4.


10.7.4 School or Connections Use of Student Images, Recordings, and School Work

To help illustrate the school program and to celebrate student successes, Connections and/or the school may want to film, interview, and/or photograph students and their work (all collectively referred to as "Connections Media Property") to duplicate, broadcast, distribute, and/or display.

For Connections and/or the school to use Connections Media Property, proper consent must be obtained through the Media Consent and Release CA-Student Data View in Pearson Online Classroom. This Data View is completed by the Caretaker/Learning Coach (or by the student, if the student is eighteen (18) years of age or older or an emancipated minor). Connections Media Property may be used for the purposes and time frame stated in the Data View.

If the Caretaker or student prefers not to have Connections Media Property used by Connections and/or the school for purposes other than the student's academic program, this should be indicated in the Media Consent

and Release CA–Student Data View.


The election on the Media Consent and Release Data View can be changed at any time. From the Pearson Online Classroom Caretaker Home Page, select the student's  and go to the Media Consent and Release CA-Student Data View.

10.7.5 School or Connections Use of Learning Coach/Caretaker Images and Recordings

To help illustrate the school program and to celebrate successes, Connections and/or the school may want to film, interview, and/or photograph a Learning Coach/Caretaker (all collectively referred to as “Depiction”) to duplicate, broadcast, distribute, and/or display.

For Connections and/or the school to use any Depiction, proper consent must be obtained through the Media Consent and Release CA- Learning Coach/CT Data View in Pearson Online Classroom. This Data View is completed by the Caretaker/Learning Coach. Any Depiction may be used for the purposes and time frame stated in the Data View.

If the Caretaker/Learning Coach prefers not to have any Depiction used by Connections and/or the school, this should be indicated in the Media Consent and Release CA- Learning Coach/CT Data View.

The election on the Media Consent and Release Data View can be changed at any time. From the Caretaker Pearson Online Classroom home page, select the Learning Coach/Caretaker  and go to the Media Consent and Release CA- Learning Coach/CT Data View.

11 Educational Materials Provided by the School

11.1 Use of School Educational Materials

The school provides each student with the temporary use and possession of various educational materials. These materials are shipped to the verified home address of the student, and a digital packing list is contained in a shipping confirmation email to the Caretaker that lists all the items the student should have received. Families should check the contents of the curriculum box against the digital packing list and call Connections Academy Student Technical Support at 800-382-6010 within seven (7) school days of receipt if anything is missing or damaged. Caretakers must keep the original packaging that materials were shipped in to facilitate their return at the end of the school year.

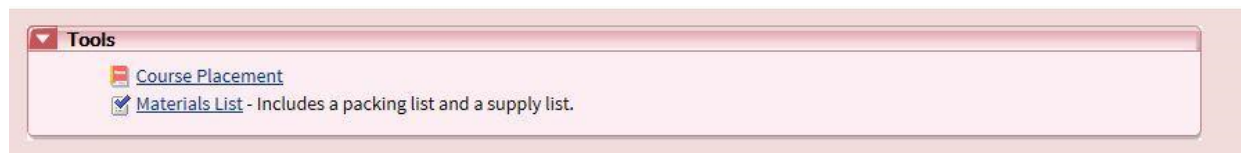
Note: The school may provide textbooks and/or materials which are in useable rather than new condition.

In addition to a packing list provided via a shipping confirmation email, an online Materials List, customized to your student’s courses, lists both the items included in the box and the additional materials you will be responsible for providing. To access the Materials List, select your student’s name under My Household in

Pearson Online Classroom. From the Tools area of the My Student page, select the Materials List link. Use the Materials List to see what materials are supplied to you and which materials you need to supply.

Purchase General Supplies

Though many of the items you need for school are supplied by your school, you may need to provide some general school supplies such as pens and pencils, highlighters, note cards, file folders, notebooks, a ruler, disposable items for science projects, etc. A Learning Coach may see this list by logging into Pearson Online Classroom and selecting their student's name. To the right under Tools there is a link to a Materials List that provides a list of materials for each course.



You may also need to be sure you have printer paper, a printer, and printer ink cartridges. Check your School-Specific Handbook Supplement to see exactly what supplies and equipment your school supplies as this varies from school to school.

Authorized Locations for School Provided Materials

The only authorized location for any school-provided materials is the address to which the materials were shipped by the school. Any movement of materials to any other location must be specifically authorized by the school using the Location Transfer Request Form found in the Enrollment section of the Virtual Library. Failure to obtain authorization may result in the repossession of, or invoicing for, the materials. Caretakers are responsible for providing the school with updated contact information (physical address, phone numbers, email addresses, etc.), including any validation for that contact information as required by the school, and keeping the information updated on the Student Information Form in Pearson Online Classroom. Since Connections may need to ship materials to a student, a P.O. Box is not an acceptable mailing address. Caretakers must provide a physical address to which materials can be shipped.

Ownership of School Provided Materials

All school educational materials remain the property of the school and/or the school's vendor partners. Further restrictions to the use of school educational materials are as follows:

- The resale or attempted resale of any educational materials constitutes theft and may subject the seller to invoicing and/or legal action.
- Refusal to return any educational materials constitutes theft and may result in invoicing and/or legal action.

- Any attempt to copy, reproduce, republish, download, post, broadcast, transmit, make available to the public, or otherwise use the educational materials in any way except as specifically directed by the school is not permitted.
- The adaptation, alteration, or creation of a derivative work from any school material is a violation of Connection Academy's Intellectual Property rights and is not permitted. Any use of school material except as specifically directed by the school requires prior written permission from the school or the owner of the materials.

All school educational materials, including WebMail messages, computers, and other technology, remain the property of the school and/or the school's vendor partners. The school or its vendor partner (as the case may be) reserves the right to, at any time and for any reason, either directly or through law enforcement, inspect educational materials and review any content or activity conducted on or through the use of school-provided educational materials, including WebMail, computers, and other technology.

Note: The use of the computer by anyone except the student for a purpose other than to support the student in their education program is strictly prohibited. Any violation of this policy may result in loss of the student's privilege to use school-provided technology. Any unauthorized use of a school-provided computer is subject to search without notice by the school, its vendor, or law enforcement. There is no expectation of privacy for students, parents/Caretakers on any platform or technologies provided, and Connections reserves the right to inspect with or without notice.

11.2 Returning School Educational Materials and Equipment

All school-provided non-consumable materials and equipment (identified as such on the materials lists and/or as noted by the school or its vendor partners) must be returned to Connections Academy or to a location designated by Connections Academy for any of the following reasons:

- The school year has ended. **Note:** The School Leader may permit the family to retain the materials for the summer in special cases, but under no circumstances can non-consumable materials be kept past August 1. If the family has indicated intent to return for the following school year, Connections Academy may not require the family to return the school-provided computer equipment.
- The student is no longer enrolled in the school (for any reason).
- The student has an extended absence away from their residence as defined in the Attendance section.
- The materials are being repossessed due to a violation of the Parent/Legal Guardian (Caretaker) Acknowledgment or a violation of the policies outlined in this Handbook.
- The student has completed the related courses and is being assigned to new courses requiring different materials.
- The school is upgrading or replacing the equipment.
- The student has an approved placement change for a course.
- Equipment and/or materials were sent in error.

Note: If the student withdraws, all materials (both consumable and non-consumable) must be returned to the school, since consumable materials may not have been used yet.

Except when materials were sent in error, or in cases of missing or damaged equipment, Connections Academy will contact the Caretaker by phone, email, or mail to arrange for the return of equipment or materials. The Caretaker has seven (7) days from the receipt of the return instructions to return all requested materials and/or equipment. Caretakers should NOT initiate a return shipment until they have been contacted by Connections Academy and provided with instructions. Families who arrange return shipping on their own prior to being contacted by Connections Academy will not be reimbursed for shipping costs.

Except in the case of repossession, Connections Academy is responsible for the cost of return shipping provided the Caretaker follows the return instructions and coordinates the return with Connections Academy. The Caretaker is responsible for being at home during the required period for a United Parcel Service (UPS) or Federal Express (FedEx) pickup or for transporting the equipment to an authorized UPS or FedEx center. The Caretaker may be responsible for the shipping cost of any items that were forgotten in a return shipment and/or were not properly packed and returned. To find a local, authorized UPS or FedEx shipping outlet, refer to the following websites:

- [UPS](https://www.ups.com/dropoff?loc=en_US) (https://www.ups.com/dropoff?loc=en_US)
- [FedEx](http://www.fedex.com/locate/index.html?locale=en_US#start) (http://www.fedex.com/locate/index.html?locale=en_US#start)

In all cases, Caretakers must maintain a copy of the UPS or FedEx return receipt. All non-consumable materials shall be returned in the same condition as delivered except for normal wear and tear. Caretakers will be responsible for, and may be invoiced for, any damage to the materials.

Caretakers shall be responsible for keeping all packing materials provided by Connections Academy and returning all equipment in its original packaging. If the original packaging is not available, Caretakers must purchase replacement packaging at an authorized UPS or FedEx center at their own expense. Caretakers may be invoiced for any damages, as permitted by state law and/or regulation, resulting from improper packaging and/or shipping procedures. If materials and/or equipment are not received by Connections Academy and the UPS or FedEx receipt bearing a valid tracking ID is not available, the Caretaker may be responsible for the cost of replacing any missing materials and/or equipment.

Failure to complete a timely return of any equipment or materials upon request shall constitute a theft and may result in invoicing or legal action as outlined in the Caretaker Due Process section of the School-Specific Handbook Supplement.

Important: Any computer files that need to be kept by the family should be extracted and any family-owned peripheral devices must be removed from computers before they are returned. Neither the school nor the

school's vendor partners have any responsibility for returning any family-owned devices or materials returned with the computer, nor to maintain or restore any files.

Connections Academy equipment is not available for purchase.

Technology

A virtual school requires the use of technology to promote and support student learning. All school participants, including Caretakers, students, and staff, will use Pearson Online Classroom and the Internet to communicate and share information. In addition, the student, Caretaker and Learning Coach(es) must all be reachable by phone for required communications with teachers and other school staff.

The school's hardware and software requirements for accessing Pearson Online Classroom can be met by using the equipment provided by the school according to your school's specific agreement. If the school does not provide this equipment, families may use a personal computer, a computer in a public institution, or any other computer as long as the equipment used meets the Connections Academy specifications (see the Use of Personal Equipment section) and permits the student and/or Learning Coach to have access for a period of time adequate for completing the required lessons each day and throughout the year. Due to certain licensing restrictions, some of the additional software provided with the school computer may not be available for use on personal computers. Families with computers provided by Connections Academy may contact Technical Support if they have specific questions about the computer's software or hardware.

11.2.1 Use of Pearson Online Classroom

Regular use of Pearson Online Classroom is required to participate in the school. The school provides training on using Pearson Online Classroom, and users are required to complete this training. Anyone using Pearson Online Classroom must also comply with the Terms of Use Policy. By using Pearson Online Classroom, users agree that they have read, understood, and will comply with these terms.

Pearson Online Classroom is generally available twenty-four (24) hours a day, except for a regularly scheduled weekly maintenance window from 4:00–7:00 a.m. Eastern Time on Sunday. There may be other scheduled maintenance times when Pearson Online Classroom will not be available; these will generally occur in the early morning or on weekends. Users will be notified in advance of any maintenance that is anticipated to disrupt service for an extended period.

Security and Privacy

Security and privacy are very important to maintaining the integrity of the information stored in Pearson Online Classroom and are taken very seriously at Connections Academy schools. Each Pearson Online Classroom user is responsible for keeping their username and password confidential. This responsibility includes frequently changing the password to prevent unauthorized use. Usernames and passwords should not be

provided to anyone at any time. Additionally, Learning Coaches are responsible for taking reasonable precautionary measures to ensure students never obtain or use their Learning Coach's passwords. Everyone using Pearson Online Classroom should be aware of the Privacy Policy (link on page 4), as well as on the login page of Pearson Online Classroom. Connections Academy agrees it will comply with the terms of this Privacy Policy.

Caretakers and students having difficulty using Pearson Online Classroom should be sure they have completed all available trainings and accessed the help resources available from their home pages. If, after completing the training and accessing the help resources, Caretakers and/or students are still unable to resolve their problems, they should consult their teachers for questions relating to the educational program or contact Student Technical Support for any technical questions.

11.2.2 Technology Provided by Connections Academy*

Access to school-provided computers is disabled immediately upon student/user withdrawal or graduation from Connections Academy. **Access cannot be re-enabled under any circumstances.** All student/user data must be removed from the computer prior to withdrawal or graduation.

Please see the Technology section of your school's website or your School-Specific Handbook Supplement for additional information.

11.2.3 Use of Connections Academy Equipment and Installed Software

At some schools, households are provided with temporary use and possession of equipment and software provided by Connections Academy. All equipment and software provided to households shall always remain the property of Connections Academy.

School Equipment

Caretakers are responsible for confirming that any equipment provided by Connections Academy matches the tracking email received. They must notify Connections Academy Student Technical Support within seven (7) school days of receipt of any discrepancies between the tracking email and what was received, or if any equipment does not arrive in good working condition.

Though Connections Academy may provide used equipment for student use, any equipment provided will be in good working condition and should function in accordance with the requirements of the school's educational program. Used equipment is supplied with only Connections Academy-authorized software installed. All computer hard drives are reimaged and reconfigured prior to being shipped to the next user.

The only authorized location for any materials is the address where the materials were shipped by Connections Academy. Any movement of materials to any other location within the state must be specifically authorized by

Connections Academy, and stationary computer equipment (desktop computer and monitor) can never be taken out of the state. Laptops, where provided, may move temporarily with the student provided the Location Change Request Form is completed and approved by the School Leader, and the student remains actively enrolled in the school. Please contact your School Leader to obtain a Location Transfer Request form if you expect to move (see Location Change).

Failure to obtain authorization can result in the repossession of, or invoicing for, the materials. Caretakers are responsible for providing the school with up-to-date contact information (address, phone numbers, email addresses, etc.), including any validation of contact information as required by the school, and keeping the information updated on the Student Information Form in Pearson Online Classroom.

Use of equipment provided by Connections Academy is only for school purposes, although limited access to personal email using a personal ISP and web-based email account is permitted. However, the use of Microsoft® Outlook®, Microsoft Outlook® Express, or any other email program that is installed directly onto the computer (“unauthorized email”) is not permitted.

The use of unauthorized email programs risks contaminating the Connections Academy computer with a virus, which could result in charges for repairs to the computer and additional penalties. Anyone using unauthorized email programs risks permanently losing any email if the Connections Academy computer has to be restored, reimaged, or returned for repair. Connections Academy will not be responsible for any loss of emails.

Software

All software settings, default configurations, and administrative privileges will be maintained at the original settings unless a change is authorized by Technical Support.

Connections Academy equipment may contain software that permits monitoring, remote access or enables remote shutdown. Personal information is not collected or maintained by Connections Academy, and any access is only for the purpose of making repairs, verifying acceptable use, or disabling equipment.

Each software application provided by Connections Academy must be used in accordance with the license and/or use agreement that accompanies that software application. Breaking a license agreement is an illegal act and is punishable by law. Under no circumstances can Caretakers or students redistribute any software provided to them by Connections Academy.

Modification of any equipment or software without Connections Academy’s consent is strictly prohibited and may result in financial charges to the household for any required repairs.

Technical Support representatives must retain an administrative account on each computer. Under no circumstance will Connections Academy provide administrator rights over the system configuration. Users who

tamper with the administrative account access will forfeit their rights to the assistance provided by Student Technical Support and may be required to return all Connections Academy computer equipment.

Software installation may also be required when adding approved external hardware. Approved external hardware includes, but is not limited to, printers, keyboards, mice, and USB devices. When purchasing these external hardware devices, families may contact Technical Support representatives, who may assist with installation if staff resources are available. The maintenance of additional devices is solely the responsibility of the purchaser. In no case may hardware be installed that requires internal compartments of the computer be opened or tampered with in any way.

Educational software not provided by Connections Academy may be installed at the discretion of and authorized by Technical Support. Caretakers are responsible for the costs of any repairs required as a result of unauthorized software installation.

11.2.4 Use of Personal Equipment and Software*

Caretakers may use their own equipment and software if they meet the requirements detailed in this section. Connections Academy has no responsibility for providing any support for equipment or software that is not provided by Connections Academy.

If Caretakers do not have access to equipment and software necessary and the school does not provide it, their student(s) may be eligible to apply for a hardship scholarship.

Users can log into Pearson Online Classroom from different devices, such as a mobile phone, tablet, or desktop computer. Most devices are regularly tested to ensure accessibility and functionality.

For the best experience, Connections recommends users update software and Internet browsers regularly on each device. The following browsers are recommended to access Pearson Online Classroom:

- Google Chrome
- Mozilla Firefox
- Internet Explorer 11 or newer
- Microsoft Edge
- Apple Safari (Mac only)

Headsets with microphones may be provided where two-way audio use is required by Connections Academy.

Many of the courses available in Pearson Online Classroom require the use of Adobe® Flash® Player. Some courses also require the use of productivity software compatible with Microsoft® Word®, Excel®, and

PowerPoint®. Some courses may have requirements in addition to what is indicated above; these requirements can be found in each course's Course Directions and Tips.

11.3 Use of the Internet

Refer to your School-Specific Handbook Supplement for your school's internet policy.

Internet Safety

All Connections Academy schools comply with the Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA). Your school handbook supplement provides specific information regarding requirements and your school's obligations under CIPA.

Users should be aware material accessible through the internet may contain items that are illegal, obscene, defamatory, inaccurate, or potentially offensive to some people. This material may be harmful if accessed by minors. In addition, it is possible to purchase certain goods and services via the internet, which could result in unwanted financial obligations for which the Caretaker would be liable. Connections Academy believes the Users' benefits of information resources and opportunities for collaboration from accessing the internet exceeds the disadvantages. However, all Users must understand and practice acceptable and ethical use.

To help all Users understand acceptable and ethical use, Connections Academy offers an Internet Safety course, which all staff members are required to take. Connections Academy strongly recommends that all Caretakers and Learning Coaches take this course, which is available in the To Do section of the Caretaker and Learning Coach's Home Page. Caretakers and Learning Coaches may review all internet sites their student(s) visit in each course by selecting the "backpack" icon. While Connections Academy has carefully screened these sites and believes they are appropriate for students, this tool makes it easy to review all links. Caretakers and/or Learning Coaches who are uncomfortable with any of the linked sites should contact their child's teacher to discuss alternatives.

Connections Academy also strongly recommends that Caretakers and Learning Coaches monitor their student's internet time and activity. To assist Caretakers in ensuring safe and appropriate use of the internet, and in accordance with CIPA requirements, Connections Academy provides the following:

- CIPA compliant filtering software to restrict access to inappropriate and harmful information and materials online. Please be aware that internet filtering software, while potentially very helpful, is imperfect and may block some educational or other appropriate content in addition to blocking potentially inappropriate or offensive content.
- An Internet Safety Course, which all Learning Coaches are urged to complete. A link to the course is provided on the Learning Coach Home Page at the beginning of the school year (or when the student first enrolls) and is always available to Learning Coaches through the Virtual Library. Connections Academy will provide age-appropriate internet safety training for students to address

appropriate online behavior, specifically on social networking websites and in chat rooms, in electronic communications, as well as training in recognizing and reporting cyberbullying.

Internet activity on Connections Academy issued computers will be monitored as required by state and federal law.

Internet Requirements

Use of the internet is a requirement for the Connections Academy program. Caretakers are responsible for arranging broadband internet service to be available during the school year. Broadband internet service must meet minimum standards for speed, availability, and compatibility to meet Pearson Online Classroom requirements. These minimum standards include the following:

- Broadband internet service with a minimum download speed of 12-25 Mbps as per the [FCC Household Broadband Guide](#)
- The use of a firewall that will permit access to Pearson Online Classroom

Internet Subsidy

In some schools, Connections Academy provides payment of an internet subsidy, but there must be at least one (1) student enrolled in the school at the time of the payment. The internet subsidy will be paid according to a payment schedule determined by Connections Academy. If a student enrolls after the start of the school year, the internet subsidy will be prorated; however, due to the high cost of processing small payments, no prorated payments will be made for amounts less than five dollars (\$5.00). Some students may be allowed a higher reimbursement for faster speed service if it is required by their IEP or if they are receiving additional remediation services that require high-speed service. The school will notify any Caretakers who are eligible for additional reimbursement.

The internet subsidy may be terminated by Connections Academy if the Caretaker(s) are in breach of the provisions of the Parent/Legal Guardian (Caretaker) Acknowledgment and/or the School Handbooks. As permitted by state law and/or regulation, if Connections Academy has invoiced a household for damage to or theft of a school-provided computer or any other school asset(s), Connections Academy may withhold payment of the internet subsidy until the invoice is fully satisfied, and/or may apply the internet subsidy towards payment of the outstanding invoice.

11.3.6 Compliance with Pearson Online Classroom Terms of Use

Any use of Pearson Online Classroom, Connections Academy equipment, or internet using Connections Academy equipment must follow Pearson Online Classroom Terms of Use, see link on page 4. Any violation of the Pearson Online Classroom Terms of Use while using Connections Academy computer equipment may result in warnings, usage restrictions, the loss of a computer or internet subsidy (where provided by

Connections Academy), confiscation of the equipment, expulsion from the school, as well as other disciplinary actions or legal proceedings. The determination as to whether a use is in violation of this policy and the penalties imposed are at the sole discretion of the school and are subject to the guidelines of the Caretaker Due Process section of the School-Specific Handbook Supplement.

11.3.7 Malfunction/Damage/Loss/Theft of School Equipment and/or Installed Software

As permitted by state law and/or regulation, Caretakers are solely liable for any loss, damage, or misuse of computer equipment provided to their household by Connections Academy.

Accidental Damage to Equipment

Where damage to the equipment and/or software is not intentional (accidental) but is caused by user negligence or carelessness, the school reserves the right to invoice the Caretaker, where permitted by state law and/or regulation. The school will limit Caretaker liability to the cost of repairs for the computer equipment. For all subsequent accidental damage, the school reserves the right, where permitted by state law and/or regulation, to invoice the Caretakers for the full cost of the repair or replacement plus the cost of shipping.

Accidental damage to equipment includes, but is not limited to, damage caused by carelessness or negligence such as exposure to excessive heat or cold, damage to equipment caused by liquid spills, dropping equipment, etc.

Non-Accidental Damage to Equipment

Where damage to the equipment and/or software is caused by a user and is not accidental or is the result of repeated failures to follow the school's policies and directions, the school reserves the right to invoice the Caretaker, where permitted by state law and/or regulation, for the full cost of the repair or replacement plus shipping.

Examples of such damage include, but are not limited to, vandalism or malicious destruction, opening the computer casing, installation/removal of internal hardware components, installation/removal of software without the school's permission, and/or manipulation of system BIOS settings. Caretakers may appeal a determination of non-accidental damage by following the procedures in the Caretaker Grievance section.

Loss or Theft of Equipment

On the first occurrence of a loss or theft of Connections Academy equipment, Caretakers may be responsible for a maximum replacement charge of up to \$400 plus the cost of shipping a replacement. Based on the circumstances, the following information may be requested from the Caretaker in instances of loss or theft of equipment:

- a copy of a filed police report or insurance loss report;

- documentation from the insurance carrier confirming that reimbursement is not available under homeowner's or renter's policies; or
- a notarized letter from the Caretaker indicating they are not insured.

If this documentation is not provided - or if there are any subsequent incidents of loss or theft - Caretakers may be responsible for the full replacement cost of any equipment and software.

Notice to School

Caretakers must notify Connections Academy (via WebMail message or by calling Student Technical Support) of any malfunction, loss, or damage to computer equipment from any cause whatsoever within seven (7) school days of the incident. Caretakers must contact Student Technical Support for all repairs and must follow all instructions as directed by the Student Technical Support representatives. Caretakers must not contact the manufacturer or a third party to repair the computer equipment unless instructed to do so by a Student Technical Support representative. If Caretakers do not comply with this policy and if there is any evidence of manufacturer or third-party involvement, the school may void the damage limitation it offers for accidents and may invoice the Caretakers for the full cost of repair or replacement.

Payment of School Invoices

In the event Caretakers are invoiced for any repair by the school or Connections Academy, payment will be due within five (5) days from the date of receipt. All outstanding invoices must be paid before additional repair services, or a replacement computer can be provided. Failure to pay any outstanding invoice will be handled as provided for in the Grievance Policy for Caretakers section of the School-Specific Handbook Supplement.

11.3.8 Contacting Student Technical Support

Support Services can be reached by calling 800-382-6010 and then selecting the appropriate menu selection for Support Services, by emailing support@pearsononlineclassroom.com, or by using the WebMail message feature in Pearson Online Classroom and sending a message to Support Services (included in the WebMail address book under Parent and Student Services).

The Student Technical Support team is available during the school's calendar year from 9:00 a.m. – 9:00 p.m. Eastern Time, Monday through Friday. Voicemail messages can be left for Student Technical Support at any time.

The Student Technical Support team should be called for the following reasons:

- Equipment or materials supplied by Connections Academy do not match the items listed on the materials list.
- A user cannot log in to Pearson Online Classroom.

- Equipment, software, or materials supplied by Connections Academy do not function or have been damaged or lost (be sure to check any training resources or the Online Help section of Pearson Online Classroom first).
- A request needs to be made to authorize the installation of hardware or software on equipment supplied by the school.
- More information is needed about obtaining an ISP or assistance is needed with creating ISP accounts for providers preinstalled on school equipment.

When contacting Student Technical Support via email, WebMail message, or voicemail message, please clearly describe the issue and provide specific contact information for a Student Technical Support representative to respond to your issue. When submitting a service request, families should provide the following information:

- Caretaker and student name,
- Phone number (including extension), email address, and state or school,
- Brief description of the problem (if contacting Support Services via email, include this information in the email subject line),
- IssueAware tracking ticket number if the issue is a continuation of an existing request (if contacting Student Technical Support via email, include this information in the email subject line, in the voicemail message, or to the Student Technical Support representative),
- Level of severity, and
- Detailed description of the problem, including any steps required to reproduce the problem.

The Student Technical Support representatives' response times depend on the severity of the issue. Student Technical Support strives to respond to all issues within twenty four (24) hours when possible, though the response could indicate more time is needed, depending on the complexity of the issue identified.

APPENDIX 1- Information about Malware and Nuisance Software

There has been a dramatic increase in the existence of malicious and nuisance software that is often inadvertently installed on computer equipment because of using the internet. This software exists as adware, spyware, and freeware—generally classified as “malware”—and can greatly impact the usability of the computer once infected. Malware is prevalent all over the internet today. Malware is mostly generated from applications or sites that provide software or services that can be generally categorized as one of four types:

- 1) **Peer-to-peer sites:** These sites offer free software that allows a user to connect to other users with the same software and share files.
- 2) **Gaming and freeware sites:** These sites offer free games and tools that easily attract kids and encourage them to install the software.
- 3) **Inappropriate sites:** Generally, most of the malicious applications that get installed on the computer without the knowledge of the end user come from sites that are inappropriate in nature, such as pornographic sites.
- 4) **Legitimate applications that have bundled free software:** Most software comes with additional free software that asks if you want to install it at the same time as the desired application. Many people just click “yes” instead of choosing not to install the unneeded bundled software, which often also includes access to pop-up ads.

Installation of malware and other nuisance software causes considerable problems in system speed and can make a computer completely unusable. Removal takes considerably more time than fixing viruses and worms, which is usually stopped by the security software already included on school equipment.

It is essential that the Terms and Conditions sections of all software, and particularly any free software, be reviewed closely. Many of them allow for the installation of other software or “tools” that can be a significant source of problems later. Included below are common sets of terms that are clear warning signs that the User may be exposed to negative consequences. These are used by many of well-known software companies and service providers.

- **Example 1:** “[Company] values your anonymity and privacy. [Software name] does not contain or bundle malicious spyware. By clicking below, you will begin the installation of [Software name/description] software. By clicking below, you agree to the third-party end-user license agreement(s) set out below.”
Comment: This is designed to make the user feel comfortable but may expose the User to a variety of other unexpected consequences as a result of other, often long and confusing license

agreements.

- **Example 2:** “By installing the [Service], you understand and agree that the following changes may be made to your Internet Explorer browser and that the following functions may be performed by the [Service]: install a Search Toolbar in your browser that may, 1) block certain pop-up ads and pages; 2) display links to related websites and key words based on the information you view and the websites you visit; 3) store non-personally identifiable statistics of the websites you have visited; 4) redirect certain URLs including your browser default address bar search, DNS error page and Search Button page to or through the Service; and 5) automatically update the Service and install added features or functionality conveniently without your input or interaction unless you have chosen to be notified of such update in advance.”

Comment: This also indicates they can install additional software without your permission.

- **Example 3:** “The web changes constantly and no technique can ever index all pages accessible on the web. As a result, [Company name] cannot guarantee the completeness or accuracy of the websites or URLs to which [Company name] Service link or refer.”

Comment: By not screening their website, any content, including content from pornographic sites, can be input as links or other forms of referrals.

Fixing problems caused by this type of software is very time-consuming. The time spent dealing with repeat offenders take time away from responsible users and results in longer delays in helping them.

It is essential that the activities of students be supervised. Students must be provided with clear guidelines for proper use of the internet, including they should never accept any software download from the internet without specific authorization from the Connections Academy Student Technical Support team. The Student Technical Support team can also aid with security settings on your computer and can provide you with separate filtering software on request. The hard disk drives of all school computers are completely erased prior to shipment to new families, and as a result, school computers do not come with any preinstalled malware or nuisance software. If any is found on a computer, it is a result of use by a family.

APPENDIX 2- Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment (PPRA) Notification

Last Reviewed and Updated: December 18, 2018

This Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment (PPRA) Notification ("PPRA Notice") may be updated periodically. The most current version is always available from the [login page of Pearson Online Classroom](#). Any changes will be effective as soon as they are posted in Pearson Online Classroom.

Description of Intent

The School follows a philosophy of continuous improvement and honest, objective data analysis. This philosophy requires well-planned and sometimes independent research efforts to determine the effectiveness of the School's programs and strategies. From time to time, the School will collect and analyze student performance data and various measures of effectiveness. In addition, families may be asked to participate in surveys or focus groups. Such research shall always be undertaken ensuring student privacy is protected and in compliance with the PPRA. For example, the names of the student, Learning Coach, and family members will not be revealed, and results will only be reported in the aggregate or by subgroupings of sufficient size so that anonymity of the participants is safeguarded.

Rights Afforded by the PPRA

The PPRA affords parents/legal guardians of minors certain rights regarding the School's conduct of surveys, collection and use of information for marketing purposes, and conduct of certain physical exams. These rights include the following:

- Requirement of parental consent prior to administering any U.S. Department of Education funded survey, analysis or evaluation that reveals information falling within the below categories ("Protected Information Survey"):
 1. Political affiliations or beliefs of the student or student's parent
 2. Mental or psychological problems of the student or student's family
 3. Sex behavior or attitudes
 4. Illegal, antisocial, self-incriminating, or demeaning behavior
 5. Critical appraisals of others with whom respondents have close family relationships
 6. Legally recognized privileged relationships, such as with lawyers, doctors, or clergy
 7. Religious practices, affiliations, or beliefs of the student or parents
 8. Income, other than as required by law to determine program eligibility.
- The right to receive notice and an opportunity to opt a student out of the following:
 1. Any other Protected Information Survey, regardless of funding
 2. Any non-emergency, invasive physical exam or screening required as a condition of attendance,

and not necessary to protect the immediate health and safety of a student, except for hearing, vision, or scoliosis screenings, or any physical exam or screening permitted or required under state law

3. Activities involving collection, disclosure, or use of personal information obtained from students for marketing or to sell or otherwise distribute the information to others
- The right to inspect, upon request and before administration or use, of the following:
 1. Protected Information Surveys of students;
 2. Instruments used to collect personal information from students for any of the above marketing, sales, or other distribution purposes
 3. Instructional material used as part of the educational curriculum.

These rights transfer from the parents or legal guardians to the student if they are eighteen (18) years old or an emancipated minor under state law or by court order.

Notification Procedures

The School will work to develop and adopt policies regarding these rights in consultation with parents/legal guardians. The School will arrange to protect student privacy in the administration of Protected Information Surveys and the collection, disclosure, or use of personal information for marketing, sales, or other distribution purposes.

The School will directly notify parents of these policies annually in this PPRA Notice or after any substantive changes. The School will also directly notify by U.S. mail, e-mail, or other reasonably available method parents/legal guardians of students who are scheduled to participate in the specific activities or surveys described in this PPRA Notice and will provide an opportunity for the parent(s) or legal guardians to opt students out of participation of the specific activity or survey.

The School will make this notification to parents near the beginning of the school year if it has identified the specific or approximate dates of the activities or surveys at that time. For surveys and activities scheduled after the school year starts, parents/legal guardians will be provided reasonable notification of the planned activities and surveys covered by the PPRA and will be provided an opportunity to opt their students out of such activities and surveys. Parents or legal guardians will also be provided an opportunity to review any pertinent surveys. The following is a list of the specific activities and surveys covered under this requirement:

- Collection, disclosure, or use of personal information for marketing, sales or other distribution
- Administration of any Protected Information Survey funded in whole or in part by the U.S. Department of Education
- Any nonemergency, invasive physical examination, or screening as described above in the Rights Afforded by the PPRA.

Reporting a Violation

Parents, legal guardians, students eighteen (18) years or older, or emancipated minors who believe their rights have been violated may file a complaint to the following:

Family Policy Compliance Office

U.S. Department of Education

400 Maryland Avenue, SW

Washington, D.C. 20202-5901

Phone: 202-260-3887

APPENDIX 3- Centralized Support Services

In addition to the staff located at the school, students and Learning Coaches have access to the centralized Connections Academy support center. Connections Help, within Pearson Online Classroom, also provides families with support and guidance outside of the Support Services business hours for live assistance.

Enrollment Services

Call 800-382-6010 or send a WebMail message to your state's "Enrollment Team" (Located under Enrollment in the WebMail address book) for questions related to the enrollment process, documents, or forms.

Academic Placement Services

Call 800-382-6010 or send a WebMail message to the appropriate school specific "Academic Placement Advisor" option (located under "Placement" in the WebMail address book) for problems or questions related to student course placement during the enrollment process. Once the student is enrolled and progressing through their courses, placement questions should be addressed to school staff.

Technical Support

Call 800-382-6010 and choose Option 5 or send a WebMail message to "Technical Support" for problems related to using Pearson Online Classroom and for hardware and software issues on Connections Academy provided computer equipment.

General Information

Call 800-382-6010 and choose Option 3 or send a WebMail message to "General Information" (located under Parent and Student Services in the WebMail address book). General Information can be used to inquire about general Connections Academy questions, shipping, and nontechnical issues that are not covered by Enrollment, Placement, or Technical Support.

Parent and Student Services

The WebMail message addresses located under Parent and Student Services in the address book help make the connection between the home and school. They include services for Learning Coaches, as well as students, from addressing the needs of selected groups of students to changing student information. All other types of questions should be directed to the school staff.