



**New Heights School**

**District 4003-07**

**FY2023-2024**

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## Introduction

The purpose of this report serves to summarize the progress and achievements, as well as areas in need of improvement, for New Heights School during the 2023-24 school year. Much of the report will highlight elements of data as it pertains to the school's contract goals with its authorizer- The Minnesota Guild for Charter Schools, other legislated requirements, and also progress made toward the school's goals established for the World's Best Workforce requirements, which were formulated at the WBWF annual meeting held on 9/13/23 at New Heights School.

## Board Approval & Availability

The Annual Report was approved by the board of directors at a normally scheduled board meeting on Tuesday, **October 16, 2024, but will also be revisited at the November 13, 2024 board meeting** to approve any items that weren't available at the deadline or to approve any other necessary changes. A copy of the report has been posted on the school's website and has been shared with *The Minnesota Guild for Charter Schools*.

## New Heights School's Mission Statement

The **Mission** of New Heights School is *to inspire and challenge each individual to reach his or her full potential.*

New Heights School was among the first schools in the state of Minnesota to be called a "charter school" or "chartered school." The school opened in the fall of 1993 and was established as a small community school created for the purpose of offering a smaller, relationship-based program for families and children wanting or needing a more personalized approach to public education. Although the vast majority of students attending New Heights have always been and continue to be from the Stillwater Area Schools district, many students enroll from surrounding Minnesota public charter schools or traditional districts; New Heights has served families from 13 MN public school districts, and many families have moved to the area from out of state because the school seems to offer something that is hard to find.

Some of the primary and distinct benefits derived from attending New Heights School include the small size of the program, as well as the ability and willingness of the school's teachers to provide assistance to their students in the classroom very quickly and authentically. At New Heights, the teachers strive to assist students at each student's ability-level as opposed to having a common and unrealistic expectation that each student is equally capable and ready to attain the same "expected" level of education within a stipulated time frame or at an arbitrary pace regardless of their individual differences and circumstances. Therefore, it is built into the mission of New Heights to address the needs and aspirations of all students, each according to his or her ability, yet in accordance with state standards when possible.

## School Governance

The board of directors of the school is responsible for the formation, adoption, amendment of, and review of policy; creating, adopting and monitoring the annual fiscal budget in conjunction with the school's administrator and the business manager; monitoring the overall progress and health of the school; and for directing, supporting, and evaluating the administrative team in the overall management of the school and its programs.

The board of directors is compliant with charter school law-124E as it pertains to the "makeup" of the board. The board holds an annual election in **May** of each for the purpose of electing candidates to serve staggered three-year terms; recently changed in the bylaws from the former term length of two years. Elections happen each year for 2 members in year 1, 2 members in year 2 and 1 member in year 3. The directors are not compensated financially in accordance with charter school law. In the event a member of the board resigns or is removed from the board, a new member may be appointed for the remainder of the vacated term. The board of directors may, from time-to-time, increase or decrease the size of the board, but must continue to meet the legislated requirements pertaining to board member makeup. The increase in directors may occur either from an election or by appointment as stipulated in the bylaws. The current board consists of 5 directors. The principal/executive director participates at board meetings as an ex-officio, non-voting member. The board of directors typically schedules meetings to occur once per month and all meetings are held at the school, with the recent exception related to the Covid 19 pandemic, which had compelled the board to hold virtual meetings for the safety of those who attend. The annual schedule of meetings is determined by each new board at the first monthly meeting in July of each year.

## Statutory Purposes of a Charter School

New Heights first opened in 1993 as one of the original, pioneering charter schools and as the nation's first K-12 charter school. Although charter schools are still thought of as "alternatives" to the traditional education sector, some argue charters have lost much of the flexibility they were originally intended to have. Within the school's contract with the **Minnesota Guild For Charter Schools**, it is stated that the **Primary Purpose** of New Heights School is to **Improve all pupil learning and all student achievement**; although learning may include lessons both academic and non-academic.

The 2 secondary purposes of New Heights within the authorizer contract are:

**-Increasing learning opportunities for pupils; and**

**-Creating new professional opportunities for teachers, including the opportunity to be responsible for the learning program at the school site.**

How does New Heights strive to *Improve all pupil learning and all student achievement*? New Heights entered the St. Croix Valley as an alternative to the public and private school systems, both of which were well established and in place for a long time by the time New Heights entered the scene. As the first few years passed by, it started to become apparent that among

the primary populations of students, subgroups, that were seeking enrollment at New Heights, there were 4 distinct sub-groups that represented the majority of the enrolled population. In each case, these students and/or their parents felt that there was something preventing them from maximizing their educational experiences. These 4 sub-groups, by and large, were and continue to be:

- Students with special needs-both diagnosed and undiagnosed-IEP and 504
- Students whose families are on the lower rungs of the SES ladder-FRP
- Students who are/were not attached to extracurricular activities or programs within their former educational programs and wanted a simplified school experience; one without cliques-no group affiliation
- Students who expressed a desire to attend school, but in a less crowded, more relational environment-anxious

In order to meet the diverse needs of these sub-groups and increase the learning opportunities and achievement for them in particular, the school worked to create a culture of acceptance, a relationship-first program, a philosophy of differentiation, and an overall calm environment. In other words, New Heights strives to offer learning opportunities that students of any ability level can succeed in, feel comfortable with fellow students and staff, and not have to worry about fitting in or not being accepted, and where the students can attend school without having to expend all of their energies battling anxiety resulting from fast-paced, overcrowded school experiences. When students are able to attend a school with that type of culture, they are more likely to be able to relax and focus on their courses and assignments more so than having to spend energy trying to keep pace with high-stakes curriculum, all while trying to fight their way through the competitive social structure that formerly had them locked out of so many opportunities.

Students have shared their testimonials over the years and have expressed that they felt welcomed and valued at New Heights. They additionally reported that they felt more connected to classmates and teachers at a significantly higher rate than they ever did in the schools they attended prior to New Heights. They also reported that they felt more confident in navigating through their school work, and felt that their teachers were more willing to assist them to get their work completed. Many also reported having “hope” for the first time in their school careers that they had a good chance of graduating from high school. And, overwhelmingly, students reported feeling “safe” at New Heights, which allows them to focus on their schoolwork more than just “surviving” a school day.

So, Whereas some might look to find awesome test scores and and highly proficient MCA data, the school focuses its efforts more on increasing learning opportunities for the students (all) who enroll at the school, taking into consideration that most of the students who enroll are leaving other school systems because the culture of those systems was not meeting their social, emotional, academic or socio-economic needs at the time, all potentially preventing them from being successful at school. New Heights, in many of those cases, is a much better environment for students who fit those profiles. The school does not focus its efforts on improving the learning opportunities for one set of struggling students, but does so for all students who attend.

This is done by recognizing the needs of each student through various academic and non-academic data points, but also through relationships over time. The school has remained intentionally small so that each student can get the attention he or she needs. And finally, the teachers are directed to use the skilled strategy of differentiation so that above-average, average and below-average students can all find something of value in each class. A school structured similar to New Heights will likely find that a higher percentage of students within the school will demonstrate that they are learning at an “improved rate” compared to their former school records. Thus, New Heights is clearly striving to (1) **Improve all pupil learning and all student achievement**, as well as (2) **increasing learning opportunities for pupils**. To a degree, while these two purposes seem separate, the school approaches both of them in the same manner.

The 3rd of the legislated purposes that New Heights meets through its contract is **creating new professional opportunities for teachers, including the opportunity to be responsible for the learning program at the school site**.

New Heights does not limit the potential growth of its staff members, but seeks to help each staff member to grow at a rate much greater than would likely be possible in other more traditional programs. For example, teachers are hired with the expectation that each teacher creates or adds to a curriculum that addresses state standards in each subject he or she teaches, but it is also important that the curriculum is authentic and relevant to the needs of the students at any given time. In most traditional school systems, teachers will be given a timeline-expectation along with a curriculum, likely chosen by the school board and supported by the school’s department head for each discipline. The teacher’s role in those environments is to be compliant and meet expectations. That is fine for a district teacher, but at New Heights the teacher must be more self-directed and must also be able to take initiative by matching curriculum to the standards, all while meeting the current needs of the students they have in their respective classes. This is not an easy task. Furthermore, district teachers will typically be assigned to teach a single subject up to five or six times per day. Sometimes a district teacher may teach a second class or subject, but will rarely and more likely never be assigned 3 separate subjects in one term. At New Heights, it is not uncommon for a teacher to have to teach 6 different courses/subjects per day with almost no preparation time provided during their duty day. This challenge seems daunting, but teachers at New Heights are able to find that they are capable of rising to the challenge and over the course of a few years will have written more curriculum and taught a more diversified set of courses than most district teachers will write and teach over an entire career. When a teacher decides it is time to leave New Heights for new opportunities, they are typically hired very quickly in the process because through the interview process, hiring officials typically find that New Heights teachers eclipse the competition because they have gained an unparalleled level of experience at a very early stage of their respective careers.

Aside from their teaching duties, many teachers also take roles in the following areas: serving on the school’s board of directors; taking ad hoc duties such as district assessment coordinator, World’s Best Workforce coordinator, Title coordinator, Food Service Authority, Yearbook Coordinator, HVAC/Boiler Tech, Student Council Coordinator, PLC Lead, Peer Coach/Mentor,

Peer Observer, and other roles that present themselves from time-to-time. In many cases, teachers will aspire toward future roles in school leadership and administration, and there have been many who have supported the school in various capacities which have assisted them in gaining valuable experiences that might have otherwise not been available to them. At New Heights, staff will be stretched in ways that support immense growth. Teachers and other staff are not limited in their ability to grow while employed at the school.

**2023-2024 BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

<b>Board Member</b>	<b>Role/Office</b>	<b>Date Seated</b>	<b>Length of Term</b>	<b>Initial Required Board Training</b>
Stephanie Bagwell	Teacher/Chair	May 2022	June 2025 Exp	11/21/2022 Via MSBA
Angie Bohnert	Teacher /Assistant Secretary	June 2023 Elected/Appointed -	June 2026 Exp	11/20/2023 Via MACS
Kathleen Johnson	Teacher/Secretary	Elected May 2021 May 2024	June 2027 Exp	08/10/2021 08/17/2021 Via MSBA
Rikk Sorenson	Community Member/Treasurer	Appointed June 2023	June 2026 Exp	11/20/2023 Via MACS
Jennifer VanDyke	Parent/Director	May 2021 May 2024	June 2027	08/10/2021 08/17/2021 Via MSBA

**\*BOARD OF DIRECTORS TRAINING** Corresponding with Charter School Law:

\*Charter school board members who do not begin the required training within six months of being seated and complete it within 12 months of being seated will be ineligible to serve on the board. The three required areas are: 1) Financial Matters, 2) Board Governance and 3) Employment Matters. All current board members have completed required training within the legislated time frame.

### **Annual Board Training**

Prior to the July board meeting (July 19, 2023 at 9 am Room 205 New Heights School), Tom Kearney, the school's principal/director, provided a training session to all of the seated board members regarding policy review July 19, 2023 at 8 am in the same location as the scheduled board meeting. The training demonstrated the process of how to review existing policies for nuance, including wording, changes to legislation which would impact the policy, and other aspects of the review process so that each board member would be able to participate in the process over his or her respective term. The training lasted approximately one hour.

### **School Management and Operations**

New Heights School has a traditional hierarchy of management beginning with the school's Superintendent/Principal/Executive Director. Thomas Kearney (**FFN 343346**) has been with New Heights since August of 1995, but began his administration as an interim-leader in September of 1996. He holds a *Superintendent of Schools* license, as well as a *K-12 Principal's* license in the state of Minnesota. The principal is primarily responsible for ensuring that the teachers and students have the appropriate materials and learning environment needed to ensure a safe and successful school experience. The principal, in conjunction with the approval of the board of directors, is responsible for all staffing at the school. This is beneficial in the sense that all staff members deciding to accept offers of employment from the principal have at least some level of shared vision with the leader of the school at the time of hire; the mission and vision are discussed in great detail throughout the hiring process. This shared vision should ideally result in fewer professional conflicts and more harmony/synergy amongst all staff.

The principal is responsible for ensuring that each employee understands and meets the expectations of each respective position. This is done, in part, through frequent observation, participation in professional learning committees (PLC), and, in part, through two-way communication between the principal and each teacher/employee. Each employee meets frequently/periodically with the principal to discuss key aspects of his or her position and areas of responsibility, and also to develop a plan, if necessary, for the employee to improve or correct behaviors/practices that were established and designed to ultimately lead to optimal performance/production of the employee. The school has developed a comprehensive teacher evaluation plan and uses a very specific rubric when evaluating teachers for effectiveness.

The principal works closely with the board of directors to ensure that the school has appropriate policies in place. It is the joint responsibility of the principal and the board to ensure effective



dissemination of school policies to families and staff members, and to ensure that all members of the school are aware of and adhere to the school's policies.

The principal is responsible for ensuring the general maintenance of the school facility. The school building is a leased property, but, as the tenant, the principal must make sure that all essential utilities and systems are operating safely. The principal communicates frequently with the school's landlord on all issues that need attention and ensures that the facility meets governmental compliance expectations.

The school's principal works with various staff members who also serve as members of the administrative team-demonstrating that many aspects of the school support a teacher/employee-led model. This includes **the office manager**, who also serves as the primary reporter on matters such as: records administration and maintenance for students and staff; student enrollment (MARSS), staff (STARS), assurances of various types, and other such elements of reporting required by the MDE. The principal and the office manager work closely together on issues such as forecasting future enrollment; policy development and dissemination; writing, revising and disseminating staff and student/family handbooks; communication between school and home; creating an annual calendar to present to the board of directors for adoption; and other issues that occur on either daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly, or on an annual basis. The principal and office manager have worked effectively together for the past 30 years.

**The school's guidance counselor/school counselor** works closely with the principal in establishing criteria for graduation; ensuring that all students meet the requirements for graduation as established by both the school and by the MDE; and establishing a class/course schedule for the students to follow each year. The guidance/school counselor is also responsible for monitoring the academic progress of each student enrolled at the school and for assisting students to obtain the necessary components/credits that may be needed to graduate. The guidance/school counselor also assists students and families in developing post-secondary plans and may even assist in the college or technical school application process upon request.

The **District Area Testing Coordinator**, or **DAC**, is responsible for the administration of all standardized testing that occurs throughout the year. This includes test setup; arranging a schedule/calendar of tests; ensuring that all required elements are in place to properly administer the tests; and ensuring that all staff members are aware of the standards required for students at all levels. The DAC works closely with the principal and the guidance/school counselor to ensure that all testing is administered properly and that the results of the testing are appropriately reviewed and analyzed. The DAC compiles and organizes all data so that the school's leadership team and affected staff can make informed decisions regarding adjusting/improving levels of academic achievement for all students.

**The bookkeeper** is a member of the school's administrative team. The bookkeeper is responsible for working closely with the principal and the board of directors to prepare and monitor an appropriate annual budget. The bookkeeper is responsible for the accounting of the school's financial matters. The bookkeeper must make available all relevant information

pertaining to the school's financial health to anyone who may inquire about it, but especially to the principal and the board of directors so that together they may make sound financial decisions on behalf of the school.

The bookkeeper must account for all funds received and held by the school.

The bookkeeper must reconcile all accounts (monthly) held by the school.

The bookkeeper works to assist in preparing the school's annual financial audit.

The bookkeeper monitors the school's assets and cash flow on an ongoing basis and makes recommendations to the school principal and to the board of directors.

New Heights holds a contract with an independent entity which serves as the **special education director** for the school. This position is required because the school serves students who have disabilities and IEPs, but the size of the school only requires a part-time staff/director to meet compliance. The special education director ensures that all aspects relevant to meeting the needs of special education students are in place. The special education director works closely with the principal and special education team to ensure that the school is compliant with all laws regulating special education and ensures that due process procedures are followed.

The school's administrative team has worked closely with one another for many years. This longevity allows for the school's business to flow smoothly with few obstacles in the way of providing families with a solid educational experience. The administrative team has developed an excellent reputation in the realm of charter schools as being compliant, professional and efficient.

\*New Heights has been a recipient of **The School Finance Award** for 12 of the past 13 school years but did not receive the award in 2023-24 because the school's auditor abruptly terminated the scheduled audit prior to its conclusion because the firm did not have the personnel to conduct it. This inappropriate and abrupt action caused the school to be unable to get the audit completed and submitted within the allotted deadline, as was the case for dozens of other charter schools within the state. New Heights was eventually able to find another firm to complete the audit, however, but the submission was too late for the school to earn the finance award. \* It is worth noting that the School was able to secure the auditor to conduct the audit for the subsequent school year, thus putting the school back on track and likely to earn the finance award again for 2024-2025.

## **Authorizer Information**

For more than 18 years, Stillwater Area Schools (ISD 834) served as the sponsor of New Heights School. The Stillwater district was actually the first public school district to sponsor a charter school in the state of Minnesota and was thus the first in the United States, as charter schools were first legislated in the state of Minnesota. However, the relationship came to a sad and abrupt end as a result of the change in legislation requiring charters to transition from “sponsors” to “authorizers;” which significantly raised the rigor and accountability of the charter school accountability-partners in the state of Minnesota. In April of 2012, New Heights’s application requesting a change in authorizer was approved, and so began a new relationship with **Innovative Quality Schools**; a single purpose authorizer. In October of 2014, New Heights submitted a new request for a change of authorizer to the commissioner of education after realizing the school and IQS were not working toward the same purposes. In the spring of 2015, the school’s request for CIA was approved and New Heights began its relationship with **The Minnesota Guild for Charter Schools**; another “single purpose authorizer.” Single purpose authorizers are simply that; organizations whose sole purpose is to support and authorize charter schools and to ensure and report on matters of compliance, innovation, and achievement. New Heights recently completed its first 5-year contract with The Guild in 2020 and has since entered into a new 3-year contract with The Guild.

The current authorizer liaison to New Heights is:

Minnesota Guild for Charter Schools

Lynn Nordgren

323 Washington Ave N Minneapolis MN 55401

email: [executivedirectormnguild@gmail.com](mailto:executivedirectormnguild@gmail.com)

**Guild Vision:** The Minnesota Guild of Public Charter Schools advances positive educational outcomes for students that lead to success in life.

**Guild Mission:** The Guild advocates for teacher leadership, professional autonomy, and the creation of innovative schools for student engagement and the ownership of learning. The Guild strives to support students, families, and communities most affected by the achievement gap and low graduation rates.

## **School Admissions/Enrollment**

The enrollment at New Heights has proven to be quite stable throughout the school's 30-year history; experiencing only a few years of "low" enrollment numbers. New Heights typically enrolls approximately 130-140 students per year and typically generates approximately 110-120 ADM. It may appear that the school has a high level of transience/mobility. This activity could be resulting from the number of special-needs children enrolling at the school, or it could also be relative to the high number of impoverished children enrolled-most likely it is a combination of the two.

The demographics at New Heights are not typical of the aggregate population in the Stillwater area in two key categories; students with learning or behavioral disabilities/disorders and students eligible for free or reduced-price meals-FRP. The local district tends to have about 15% of students qualify for special education services and New Heights typically has about 40% of its students who meet eligibility criteria. Additionally, the local district tends to have about 15% of its population qualify for free or reduced price meals while New Heights tends to have more than 50% eligible, sometimes as high as 65% eligible. New Heights has tended to serve significantly higher percentages of students in those two subgroups as compared against the local district since the school's inception in 1993; most likely because students representative of the two subgroups perceive that they are not having their needs met or perceive that they are not being "heard" within a district setting. Although there are several underlying factors, the high concentration of students with disabilities and students living in poverty tends to have a profound impact on the school's overall levels of academic achievement; which will be addressed later in the report.

## **Program Successes and Best Practices**

### **30-Year Achievement Award**

New Heights is among the longest standing and oldest charter schools in the state of Minnesota and also in the United States. In September of 2023, New Heights was acknowledged and presented with recognition for 30 years of service and for being one of the original pioneering charters schools in the Country. This endeavor is worthy of recognition in the same manner as any small business that stands the test of time. It demonstrates that the school, in conjunction with staff, leadership and local community support have successfully navigated the inherent challenges it has faced successfully and still remains as a viable school choice option in the area.

### **Charter School Leadership Award MACS**

The school's executive director, Thomas Kearney, was nominated by the staff of the school as a candidate for the Charter School Leadership Award offered through the Minnesota Association of Charter Schools during the 2023-24 school year. After a lengthy process, the application reviewers conferred and agreed that the award should be presented to Thomas Kearney above the other nominees. This award distinguishes Thomas and the school as being excellent

examples of leaders in Policy, Longevity, Resourcefulness, including finance, and Service to the Community. Thomas and members of the staff are both proud and humble to have received this award.

During the charter school's twenty-nine-year history, New Heights has initiated many program changes to properly meet the needs of the ever-changing student population. Currently, New Heights serves students in all grades K-12. The elementary section serves students in grades K-5 in multi-age classrooms; primarily due to the small population and need to combine grades for fiscal reasons. The K-1 classroom hosts up to 20 students, and, depending on the class size, may also occasionally utilize a paraprofessional or a high-level volunteer to offer more support to students who need it. The teacher makes use of a 2-year rotating curriculum, which is standards-based, so that students enrolled at New Heights may learn all of the same core skills and concepts that would be offered and required at any Minnesota public school over the same 2-year span. The teachers of all grades and levels make use of differentiation strategies to accommodate for individual differences of the students in the classes. For some unidentified reason, the majority of our students who have entered kindergarten over the past few years did not attend preschool, making it an additional challenge for the teacher to help the students' progress through the state-prescribed standards within the prescribed time frame.

Students in grades 2-5 also attend school in two multi-age classrooms 2-3 and 4-5 respectively; class sizes are capped at 25, but rarely have reached the cap. They also experience a 2-year rotating curriculum, and they too learn in accordance with the Minnesota state standards prescribed for students in each respective grade. In addition to home-class, these students are offered small-group reading and math instruction, largely based on ability rather than arbitrarily by age/grade as districts tend to do; the majority of the school's students tend to enroll below grade level, which may have been a reason for the enrollment in the first place. They also receive **physical education** every day; **special education** for all students meeting eligibility criteria; and **speech and language** services for eligible students. Enrichment opportunities are offered to all K-5 grade students. Offerings include enrichment-based learning opportunities which occur on a rotating basis in **music, art, character education & social curriculum**, and **Yoga Calm**.

For students in all grades K-5 qualifying/eligible for additional support, a special education teacher/case manager serves as a member of the elementary team, as well as a speech and language pathologist, physical education teacher, school counselor, and various members of the secondary teaching faculty; particularly those licensed in math, language arts and reading.

During the 2023-24 school year, the K-5 elementary section of the school hosted approximately 41 students. This number allowed for small class sizes and flexibility in meeting the individual and collective needs of all students.

The 6-12 grade section hosted a total of **81** students. Secondary students follow a traditional schedule. There are six class periods per day, each meeting for **55** minutes. Students are provided with a schedule of courses designed to meet or exceed the state standards in each

required discipline. Class sizes are limited to **25**, but there were no classes at capacity during the year.

Teachers are challenged to provide differentiation of instruction in each class they teach due to the wide range of abilities and needs within any given class; especially given the structure of the high school, which typically groups the students by grade. Students take such classes as math; language arts; physical education; social studies; science; career exploration; health; and some students may choose to take specialty on-line classes when appropriate. Students eligible for special education services are assigned a case manager and have access to a well-appointed resource room; may have assignments modified; and may be eligible to receive a variety of other modifications to the school day as determined by the IEP team and documented in Individualized **E**ducation **P**lans.

### **Advisory**

Secondary staff members serve as “advisors” to a group of students from various grades. The purposes of advisory include creating a system of guidance for students to successfully navigate each school year. Each advisory session, which occurs about every 4 weeks, is to provide an educational opportunity for the students on some particular topic selected by members of the staff and administration. Topics are usually related to something the staff recognizes and important and needing attention. A topic might include something like Wellness, which addresses several aspects of what students can do to improve upon various areas of wellness such as hygiene, sleep, exercise, participation in counseling, proper nutrition and self-advocacy. Other segments of the advisory might include checking on progress as a student such as attendance, work completion, behavior management, etc. Advisors also work on goal setting students so that they can set, monitor and maintain an appropriate navigational path to be successful throughout the year. The school has used this system for a few years and has seen success among the majority of the student body.

### **Why Choose New Heights?**

Students choose to enroll at New Heights School for many reasons. At the time of exploration, children often express an interest in finding a smaller, more personalized program designed to focus on individual needs when compared to a larger school system, which may not be able to offer such personalization simply due to the sheer size of some district schools. Students may also express a desire to have closer relationships with and more accessibility to their teachers, which can make it more likely for them to ask for assistance when needed.

At New Heights, students typically attend classes with the same staff year-after-year. This has proven to be a huge benefit since the students are able to learn the classroom expectations and norms of each of their teachers early in their New Heights experience and then know exactly what is expected of them year-after-year. These perennial relationships are also a benefit to the teachers as they are better able to design and prepare lessons and create programming more authentically for their students based on their personal, longitudinal

knowledge of individual abilities, tendencies, and learning styles of each of their students. This is especially true with special education students who are eligible to receive various modifications and accommodations to the regular curriculum. Obviously, most teachers of large district schools would probably admit that they would benefit from the level of baseline knowledge about their students that New Heights' teachers have. Teaching the same students term-after-term and year-after-year provides the teachers with an awesome opportunity to measure growth and impact to their students over a longer period of time because lessons can be tailored and adjusted to meet the true needs of individual students in classes at any given time. Teachers in larger systems simply can't do that because they lack the longitudinal data needed to do it, or simply because teachers in large school systems are teaching to the masses and aren't able to adjust the curriculum in the way teachers in small schools can. At New Heights, teachers can see the true impact they have made with their students over time; teachers don't teach to the curriculum, they teach to the students' needs.

Recently, we have come to understand that some students today have a new need; a need for a smaller and calmer school. New Heights is the smallest and arguably the calmest school in the area. Students who have battled the overcrowded hallways and classrooms of local district schools have expressed a desire to enroll in and attend a smaller, less hectic version of the public system; New Heights. At informational meetings, typically held during an actual school day, families can't help but notice how much calmer and structured New Heights seems compared to the schools they may be currently attending. As families tour through the school they note that students are in the classrooms while hallways are quiet and free of unnecessary noise and distractions prevalent in larger schools. It is clear that the smaller environment offers a potentially less stressful and less hectic day for the majority of students who enroll. The calmer environment allows students to focus more of their energy on learning and problem solving, while less energy is needed for the social issues so prevalent in the larger school systems today; including having to fit in the school's social schema. For those seeking a smaller, calmer school, they often look no further than New Heights.

## Academic Performance

The following chart may be used to illustrate MCA Proficiency data from New Heights School for since 2016. \*Values rounded to the nearest whole number.

<b>MCA Reading</b>	<b><u>Proficiency</u></b> <b>*Met or Exceeded</b>	<b><u>MCA Math</u></b>	<b>Proficiency</b> <b>*Met or Exceeded</b>
2016	23%	2016	8%
2017	30%	2017	19%
2018	23%	2018	16%
2019	31%	2019	24%
2020	NM	2020	NM
2021	19.5%	2021	8.3%
2022	22.6%	2022	11.3%
2023	30%	2023	20%
2024	28.2%	2024	11.3%

The administration and teaching staff at New Heights have long recognized the need to make continuous improvement to rates of academic achievement and rates of proficiency of our students on the MCA tests; however, when compared to statewide statistics, especially FRP and Special Education, our students seem to be on par. Historically, there have been several factors consistently contributing to the sub-standard proficiency data, including the small cell sizes inherent at the school, which allows for inflated highs and lows in any given year; the disproportionate number of transient students who enroll at the school; the high percentage of enrolled students who have diagnosed learning disabilities; as well as the effect of negative and



stressful school experiences, perhaps trauma informed, had by our students prior to enrolling at New Heights, which contributes to negative attitudes about school for some students. Also, a high percentage of students who enroll at New Heights tend to lack the basic and requisite skills in reading and mathematics typically expected of students of respective ages, which is likely a reason some of them change schools in the first place; poor academic performance. These requisite skills, although often lacking, are paramount in developing the higher-order problem solving skills considered rudimentary and necessary in successfully navigating the MCA exams. The teaching staff and administration review the MCA results from previous years and are constantly working to make improvements in both math and reading performance, although it is worth noting that the Covid 19 pandemic caused a ripple effect in academic performance that is still noticeable in school performance. In many cases, students have lost ground academically and it seems that it will take some time before levels are restored to pre-pandemic levels.

### **Future Plans/Innovative Practices**

Any future plans of a school or district should obviously include the addition of programming designed to enhance the “best” of what is currently available. Although there are many features of New Heights worthy of recognition and praise, there are also areas that simply need to be improved upon and those are the areas everyone seems to be focused on. For example, an unintended benefit of being required to place students on distance learning due to Covid 19 is that the staff had to quickly learn how to reach their students via a digital platform. The school’s administration had been wanting to explore ways to offer a digital curriculum for years, but was slow to move since there was no requirement to do so. The pandemic made offering a digital platform essential. Although there is still a lot of room for improvement, the school and staff made great strides in learning to teach through Google Classroom. As the school moves forward, it seems that Google Classroom will play a large role, especially for students who benefit from the use of technology, or those students who tend to fall behind and need additional time and resources to get caught up. The administration and the teachers all learned a lot about themselves, at least in terms of their ability to react to adverse circumstances in a positive way.

New Heights continues to work together as a staff through our professional learning committees (PLC’s). These PLC’s were created for the purpose of providing teachers with an opportunity to learn, share and collaborate with one another on improving in all areas of lesson planning, classroom instruction, standards alignment, classroom management, and data recording and analysis, as well as learning to effectively react to the data. The PLC’s have focused on data collection and analysis with the goal of learning more about what students in the classroom are actually learning and how effectively teachers are teaching. In order to understand more about what is actually being learned in the classroom by students, teachers have been working on the formation and widespread use of formative assessments and summative assessments (FAs and SAs); tools designed to show exactly what lessons students are learning, as well as which areas students are struggling in. Once teachers began to fully understand how to create and make the best use of FAs and SAs, they became better at assessing how and when to adjust classroom practices so that all students are able to demonstrate growth. The use of FAs and SAs is now a common practice among all teaching staff members.

For many years our staff has been learning about The **Gradual Release of Responsibility** strategy-GRR and making use of it within the classroom. This strategy promotes the concept of the teacher spending less time in direct instruction while providing students with more time to work on assignments in class and to take more responsibility for their own learning as opposed to more traditional classes where the teachers dominate the space, lecture to students, and then send out piles of homework for the students to do alone. The GRR model says teachers become more of a guide or facilitator of instruction rather than a dispenser of information. This makes class time more meaningful for the student as they are able to work on assignments and have the support of the teacher when needed. The students can become effective agents in their own education rather than passive passengers in the teacher's classroom.

Teachers understand the power of goal setting with students. The staff has come to understand that students may be willing to do the work in class, but they often struggle with connecting the significance of the work with successes earned outside of the classroom. Teachers are learning to help students set appropriate learning goals designed to increase the level of student engagement within the learning process. Prior to Covid, students were demonstrating that, when included in the process of establishing meaningful learning goals, they are much more engaged and interested in the process from beginning to end. Goal setting has been a major point of emphasis since the 2015-16 school year and will be even more instrumental in the current school year through a newly designed Advisory program in the 6-12 grades.

Additionally, the staff understands that the school needs to demonstrate that students are learning, but at higher levels than recent trends have indicated. The staff is seeking out professional development opportunities that can assist in helping them to understand more about how to reach and impact the types of students served at New Heights. The staff is learning more about different mindsets students may have which may support and restrict learning. Knowing that these mindsets exist and understanding how to help students develop a **growth-mindset** may be instrumental in raising the achievement levels of all of our students over time. The staff is truly united in school-wide improvement efforts and we are optimistic and determined to help our students improve.

Finally, the administration and staff recognize that students of today need something very different than students needed 20 years ago, yet many facets of education remain locked in the old methods and practices of generations gone by. The pandemic has created an opportunity to reconnect with our current students and start to understand that who they are and what they need are both very different than during pre-pandemic times. Terms like social-emotional needs and trauma-informed needs are becoming ubiquitous in educational circles. Schools like New Heights are going to have to make some drastic changes if we are going to reach our students where they need it most. We will be researching ways to do this in the future.

## Teacher Staffing Information

New Heights School employed 18 personnel during the 2023-24 school year. Aside from the licensed teachers noted below, New Heights employed **five personnel in administration and support staff** including: Principal, Bookkeeper, Office Manager, part-time seasonal Health Office Attendant, part-time seasonal Special Education due process secretary, and part-time seasonal food service. Aside from the principal, the other 4 positions were non-licensed staff.

Name	Licensed Area	Assignment	Status	Total Years at NH	FF#
Stephanie Bagwell	5-12 Communication Arts/Literature	6-12 English	R	3	1008075
Angie Bohnert	K-12 DD/LD	Special Education 6-12	R	3	460693
Mary J Carlson	K-12 EBD	Special Education 6-12	R	6	412661
Sofia Engebretson	Social Studies	Social Studies 6-12	R	2	1017591
Nicole Graeve (Johnson)	OFP Mathematics  Business Ed.	9-12 Math	R	2	1011379
Christie Hogan	K-6 Elementary Education	Elementary 2-3	R	8	455906
Kathleen Johnson	K-6 Elementary Education  5-8 Mathematics	5-8 Math  Elementary Reading	R	6	508060

Abigail Lindquist	B-Grade 3	Elementary K-1	R	3	494205
Annah Massmann	School Counselor	Guidance Counselor	R	7	502314
Nate Murphy	Social Studies 5-12	Social Studies 5-12	N	1	1026729
Kirk Nelson	K-12 P.E. 7-12 Health	Phy Ed, Health K-12	R	26	378824
Geoff Osterbauer	Social Studies	Social Studies 7-12	N	1	1027178
Deandra Purcell	K-6 Elementary Education	Elementary 4-5	R	2	1005116
Philip Ragan	Science 5-8 Physics 9-12	6-12 Sciences	N	1	1001967
Shane Wiebusch	ABS	K-12 Special Education	N	1	1031248
<a href="#">Anne Humphrey</a>	Non-Licensed	Special Education Due Process Secretary	R	3	N/A
Anna Ochs	Non-Licensed	Health Office Attendant	N	1	N/A

Franklin McCully	Non-Licensed	Food Service	R	11	N/A
Lisa Bowman	Non-Licensed	Classroom Para	N	1	N/A
Lindsay Berberich	Non-Licensed	School Accountant Office Manager	R	13	N/A

\*R =Returned from Prior Year(s)

\*N = New 2023-2024

\*Total Years at NH refers to the total number of years the teacher has worked at New Heights including the 2023-2024 school year

**Student Attrition/Retention:**

Throughout the **2023-24 school year**, a total of **122 students were enrolled**, some new and some returning. New Heights enrolled **23 new students** on or after the first day of school and **18** withdrew throughout the year for various reasons. As of Monday October 2, 2023, there were **104** students enrolled at the school. **The retention rate is as follows.** Of the **104** students enrolled on October 2, 2023, **5** of them were **Kindergarten** students, so they aren't counted in the retention data-which means the number of students to base retention numbers on is **99**. On the last day of school the previous year, **June 2, 2023**, there were **90** students in grades **K-11** who could have returned the following year in August of 2023, but the actual number of returning students was **69**, or **76.6%**. The reasons for those not returning are varied.

Of the **104 students enrolled on October 2, 2023**, **18** did not finish the school year at New Heights for a variety of reasons.

Enrollment by the numbers:

Below you will find a snapshot of enrollment data by grade for **October 1st** or the first school day of October for that year (snapshot of enrollment) of the past 4 years as well as current year. You'll notice slight variation from one year to the next, but overall, the enrollment remains steady:

**FY 2021 October 1, 2020**

	HCP	K	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Total
<b>F</b>		0	1	1	7	3	0	6	0	3	2	6	6	4	2	41
<b>M</b>		1	0	3	2	1	4	3	4	8	10	9	10	2	8	65
<b>Totals</b>		1	1	4	9	4	4	9	4	11	12	15	16	6	10	106

**FY 2022 October 1, 2021**

	KG	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Total	
<b>F</b>		1	2	1	8	4	1	4	1	9	2	6	8	5	52
<b>M</b>		2	1	3	4	1	6	5	5	5	8	13	6	2	61
<b>Totals</b>		3	3	4	12	5	7	9	6	14	10	19	14	7	113

**FY 2023 October 3, 2022 (October 1st was a Saturday)**

	<b>HK</b>	<b>KG</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>Total</b>
F	0	1	2	2	1	6	2	2	5	4	9	4	7	6	51
M	1	2	1	0	4	5	3	5	4	4	4	7	13	7	60
Totals	1	3	3	2	5	11	5	7	9	8	13	11	20	13	111

**FY 2024 October 2nd, 2023 (October 1st was a Sunday)**

	<b>KG</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>Total</b>
F	4	2	2	5	2	5	1	2	8	4	7	5	5	52
M	1	3	1	1	4	6	6	3	5	3	5	7	7	52
Totals	5	5	3	6	6	11	7	5	13	7	12	12	12	104

**FY 2025 Current Enrollment as of October 1, 2024:**

	<b>KG</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>Total</b>
F	2	3	5	2	5	3	8	2	4	3	5	6	4	52
M	4	1	5	2	3	4	8	7	2	5	4	5	7	57
Totals	6	4	10	4	8	7	16	9	6	8	9	11	11	109

**Progress Toward Authorizer Contract Goals:**

\*Several of the school’s authorizer contract goals are based on testing data that could not be compiled due to complications resulting from the pandemic. Many of the goals required testing that was not administered, including the MCA tests. NM may appear in the cells as “Not Measurable.”

**Accountability Goal 1; 3rd Grade Reading:**

The percentage of students in grades 1-3 meeting “projected-growth” in reading, as measured by the FASTBridge (spring to spring) assessment, will increase from a baseline of 43% by 1.5% in year 1; 2.5% in year 2; 3.5% in year 3 and 3.5% in year 4.

Baseline	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24
43%	44.5%	47%	50.5%	54%
Percentage Realized:	NM	35% Not Met	43% Not Met	52.1% Not Met

\*Although the goals have not been met, the goals increase by % each year, but the school’s performance is also increasing. The increases to performance indicate that the students are trending upward.

**Rationale: Aligned to the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade literacy goal (WBWF)**

Many New Heights students enroll without having had preschool, or have not made the “normal” benchmarks prior to enrolling at New Heights; simply meaning they enroll behind expected levels on average. Additionally, New Heights has become a popular choice for families who may have students diagnosed with disabilities 40% or who may be living in poverty 50% or more annually, simply meaning we tend to have a higher concentration of students who perform low on standardized tests. As our population tends to need more support, the percentage of students not proficient or who test below expected levels tends to be higher. We believe that we can slowly increase the percentage of students performing at “expected growth” over time. The longer the students have been enrolled, the gaps should decrease by higher rates.

**Accountability Goal 2; MCA Reading:**

Students in grades 3-8 and who are continuously enrolled (October 1st) for two consecutive years, will demonstrate a reduction on the MCA Reading of “Does not meet” and “Partially meets,” from a baseline of 72%. *Year one reduction of -1.5%; Year two reduction of 2.5%; Year three reduction of -3.5% and -3.5% in year 4.*



Baseline	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24
72%	70.5%	68%	64.5%	61%
Percentage Realized:	Not Measured	66% Goal Met	63.6% Goal Met	64.3% Goal Not Met

Rationale: As students continue to be enrolled at New Heights, several things contribute to better academic outcomes. We believe that students who remain at the school choose to return because the culture of the school suits them. They also must feel that the teachers know them and understand their needs. This is likely true because teachers, over time, will form relationships with students that result in adjustments to curriculum to authentically meet the needs of the students more appropriately each year. As the school and students continue to adjust to each other, academic achievement levels tend to rise over time. Students should be able to increase MCA performance over a 3-year period when compared against baseline, entry level data.

**Accountability Goal 3; MCA Math:**

*Students in grades 3-8 and who are continuously enrolled (October 1st) for two consecutive years, will demonstrate a reduction on the MCA Math of “Does not meet” and “Partially meets,” from a baseline of 79% . Year one reduction of -1.5%; Year two reduction of -2.5%; year three reduction of -3.5%.*

Baseline	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24
79%	77.5%	75%	71.5%	68%
Percentage Realized:	Not Measured	85.7% Not Met	78.6% Not Met	87% Not Met

\*Math continues to be an area of difficulty for New Heights Students. The staff have explored various types of curriculum and have also collaborated with the special education department to find a better approach to meeting the students’ needs.

Rationale: As students continue to be enrolled at New Heights, several things contribute to better academic outcomes. We believe that students who remain at the school choose to return because the culture of the school suits them. They also must feel that the teachers know them and understand their needs. This is likely true because teachers, over time, will form relationships with students that result in adjustments to curriculum to authentically meet the needs of the students more appropriately each year. As the school and students continue to adjust to each other, academic achievement levels tend to rise over time. Students should be able to increase MCA performance over a 3-year period when compared against baseline, entry level data.

**Accountability Goal 4; Graduation Rates.**

Annually, students who have been continuously (as of October 1st of the student’s first year) and enrolled for 3 out of 4 years will graduate at a minimum average rate of 80%.

Baseline	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24
80%	80%	80%	80%	80%
Percentage Realized:	7/7 100% Goal Met	2/2 100% Goal Met	10/10 100% Goal Met	9/9 100% Goal Met

Rationale-- Students enrolled for 4 years will be provided wrap-around support and guidance to obtain what they need to successfully graduate.

One of the main reasons students choose to enroll at New Heights School is because they weren’t finding success in their former school environments-typically the local district. New Heights is a charter school, but many of the students who choose to enroll might otherwise be encouraged to enroll in the district supported program, which is commonly called the ALC. New Heights does not prefer to compare itself with other programs, but to emphasize the importance of the work that New Heights does, a comparison to the local ALC graduation rates does demonstrate and validate that New Heights is doing important work, especially considering that New Heights outperforms the local ALC when it comes to several metrics, including the overall, 4, 5, 6, and 7 year graduation rates. For example, a side-by-side comparison demonstrates that New Heights has a higher percentage of its students who graduated in 2023, whereby New Heights graduated 75% compared to ALC which graduated 50% of its students according to the 4 year rate, and New Heights also outperformed ALC in the 7 year rate with 80% compared to 75% at the ALC. While this may seem like a non-comparison to some, it at least demonstrates that New Heights can hold its own when compared to the larger more generously funded district alternative program located within the same community and which serves a similar type of student from the same community New Heights draws from.

**Accountability Goal 5; Attendance Rate:**

According to EOY Marss Data, the school will **Maintain** an aggregated average daily attendance rate of 90% or higher for continuously enrolled (Oct. 1 Thru end of year) students in each of the contract years 1-3.

Year	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24
Goal:	90%+	90%+	90%+	90%+
Percentage Realized:	92.28% Goal Met	87.03 Goal Not Met	90.26% Goal Met	90.58% Goal Met

\*The poor attendance in the FY22 year was largely due to a shift in behavior stemming from the pandemic. Families kept children home for longer periods of time for illnesses.

Rationale: The school works to ensure that all students enrolled attend school at a rate of at least 90% to be in accordance with the state’s expectations for compulsory attendance, but more so to ensure that students are at school engaged in learning and maximizing their opportunities to reach their full potential. They can not reach their full potential if they miss learning opportunities. Whereas there will also be a handful of families who, for whatever reason, can not conform to attendance expectations, the vast majority will demonstrate high levels of attendance, thus the school’s average rate of attendance will be more than 90% for all years. Although the school has met the goal most years, it is clear that Covid and Covid-related lockdowns changed the way people attend school and work. The school is still working to help families re-adjust back to a pre-Covid level of thinking when it comes to the importance of having solid school attendance rather than to think of attendance at school as casual or optional.

**Accountability Goal 6; Parent/Student Satisfaction/Safety Survey:**

**Goal A:** Annually, a minimum of 80% of parents/guardians surveyed will indicate a level of ‘satisfied’ or ‘very satisfied’ with the learning opportunities and the school program, as indicated on end-of-year parent surveys.

**Goal B:** Students will report feeling “safe” in the school environment through various forms of documented surveys.

Year	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24
<b>Goal A</b>	80%	80%	80%	80%
Percentage Realized:	100%	82%	86%	92.3%
<b>Goal B</b>	81% Goal Met	84% Goal Met	83% Goal Met	86% Goal Met

Rationale: Students are less likely to do well in school if the school isn’t perceived to be a safe place. New Heights strives to offer an extremely safe school experience and we believe the students continue to choose the school largely because of the safe school culture found throughout.

Two important questions from the survey indicate that students overwhelmingly feel safe while at school. “As a parent or guardian, my overall level of satisfaction with New Heights for the current school year...” “Very Satisfied” was 73.1% and “Satisfied” was 19.2% totaling 92.3% Satisfied or Very Satisfied.

Students in grades 6-12 when asked to respond to the following statement...“I feel safe in this school physically” 40.6% Strongly Agreed and 56.3% Agreed for a total of 96.9% who “feel safe.”

Elementary students in grades K-5 were asked a series of questions regarding safety at school. The main question in this category asked them to respond to the following statement: “I believe the adults in school take good care of me and keep me safe.” 66.7% of the students agreed. The difficulty with this type of question for students in the youngest grades is that students at the early stages of development seem to lack a concept of what safety means. In talking with them, some perceive things like not being invited to a birthday party or students saying rude things is a violation of their safety. The school is working to help all students to develop a concept of what safety means at appropriate stages of their development.

**Accountability Goal 7-**

ALL students enrolled at New Heights in grades 9-12 will begin to develop a post-high school (college and career readiness) plan with the support and guidance of the school counselor during the first semester of 9th grade, or as soon as possible when enrolling after semester 1, 9th grade. Each student will be able to demonstrate/articulate his or her plan to the guidance counselor prior to graduation to ensure that all necessary elements are present. All 9-12 students will have an annual year-end meeting with the school counselor to verify benchmarks have been met for each student’s respective age/stage of the process, including a review of goals set and reached, as well as establishing the next steps for the subsequent year. This goal is aligned to the World’s Best Workforce (WBWF) goal “all students are ready for career and college.”

Percentage of students who have an annually-reviewed post-high school plan in place with the school counselor:

Contract Year	FY2021	FY2022	FY2023	FY2024	FY2025
Goal Percentage	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Annual % (Increase/ decrease)	COVID	100%	100%	100%	
Goal (Met/Not Met)	Not Met due To Covid	Met	Met	Met	In Progress

## World's Best Workforce (WBWF) Goals and Results Summary

Minnesota public schools are required to establish a series of specific goals for students in various but specific grades and then monitor and report on the progress of those goals. In most cases, there is a direct correlation between the **WBWF** goals and the authorizer goals for New Heights. The following summarizes the WBWF goals and the results of the progress towards those **WBWF** goals for the 2022-23 school year, which were established at the annual meeting held on **September 13, 2023** at New Heights School.

### I. Goals and Benchmarks

#### World's Best Workforce (WBWF) Goals: 2023-2024

- **All Children ready for School:** By October 1, of the 2023-2024 school year, all students enrolled in kindergarten at New Heights will participate in the Fastbridge aReading and aMath assessments to determine their appropriate instructional level. **5/5 GOAL MET**
- **All Third Grade Students Can Read at Grade Level:** By the end of the FY 2023-24 school year, the percentage of students continuously enrolled (October 1st- end of year) in grades 1-3 meeting "projected growth" in aReading, as measured by the FastBridge assessment, will increase by 3.5% from 50.5%-54%. Students percentage rate was **52.1%**. **GOAL NOT MET**

**Although this goal was not met, the students improved and were very close to achieving the projected goal.**

- **Closing the Achievement Gap: MCA Reading:** The percentage of students who are continuously enrolled (October 1st) for two consecutive years, in grades 3-10 at New Heights School who demonstrate a lack of proficiency on the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment (MCA) in Reading will decrease by 3.5%. Students collectively needed to score **at or below 61%** but scored at 64.3%. **GOAL NOT MET**
- **Closing the Achievement Gap: MCA Math:** The percentage of students in grades 3-10 who are continuously enrolled (October 1st) for two consecutive years at New Heights School who demonstrate a lack of proficiency on the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment (MCA) in Math will decrease by 3.5%. Students needed to collectively score at **68% or lower** and the students' actual collective score was **87%**. **GOAL NOT MET** \*Math continues to be an area of difficulty for New Heights Students. The staff have explored various types of curriculum and have also collaborated with the special education department to find a better approach to meeting the students' needs.
- **College and Career Readiness:** By the end of the 2023-2024 school year, students in grades 9-12 will meet with the school counselor to develop individualized Personal Learning Plans to guide their plans for post-secondary education or employment. 100% of 9-12 grade students who were continuously enrolled participated in this activity with the school guidance counselor. **GOAL MET**

\*For information regarding some of the activities the students participated in, click on the following link:

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1oJKQZ6Bxw1L4szzNjMrx01ebIDZ-7eckQadkdolg04/edit?usp=sharing>

● **All Students Graduate from High School:** Annually, students who have been continuously (as of October 1st of the student's first year) and enrolled for 3 out of 4 years will graduate at a minimum average rate of 80% when cell sizes allow for at least ten students. For FY24, 10/10 students meeting the criteria met the requirements for graduation 100%. **GOAL MET**

\*This is a lofty goal, but school officials are confident that when students are enrolled at New Heights for the vast majority of their high school years, they will graduate!

### **Performance Improvement Plan (PIP):**

No school is perfect, which means that schools, including New Heights, all have things they excel at, as well as areas identified as those needing improvement. In conjunction with the school's authorizer, The Minnesota Guild for Charter Schools, the following areas have been identified as "needing improvement" in the most recent iteration of the PIP.

(1) New Heights will meet the contract goals on an annual basis.

**Action:** In most cases, the school has achieved its goals, except in some academic cases where there are factors somewhat outside of the control of the school. The goals within the contract are valid goals and achievable, but the school and staff are still dealing with the lingering impact of Covid 19, including the lockdowns which had a profound impact on many students, especially our youngest students who were in key developmental stages of their early academic experiences. For many, attendance at school seems to be considered as less important or less necessary, and more incidental. The school continues to work with families who aren't getting their children to school at a rate of 90% or higher, which of course is detrimental to their children's academic success.

The school continues to be well-recognized for its service model, which seems to have become a bit of a hub for students with learning disabilities. At times, the school's population hovers somewhere around 50% of its students who have IEPs or 504 plans. While much progress may be made with this population, core academics and the fundamental skills of reading, writing and mathematics continue to be areas that many of these students struggle in, as part of their disability area. Despite that, these students, in most cases, are making substantial gains in other areas such as social functioning, lessening levels of anxiety, and gaining self-advocacy skills. That said, the school has and will continue to afford all efforts at reaching higher academic levels with virtually all of its students in the coming years.

(2) Alternative assessments are administered annually, fall to spring.

**Action:** Whereas many schools measure their progress on MCA exams, New Heights finds those assessments to be more rigorous and arbitrary than many of the school's students can handle. In many cases, possibly most cases, students who transfer to New Heights School typically do so already one or more years behind grade level. That, of course, means that these students will inherently struggle on grade-level MCA exams. In light of that, the school chooses to use Fastbridge testing. Most students will test 3 times per year, Fall, Winter, and Spring. The results inform the teachers about how to adjust curriculum and pace throughout the year. We believe that a more appropriate type of evaluation of the school's ability to make progress with its students is to measure individual growth as opposed to achievement on a fixed level as the MCA does. A recent study demonstrates that students across the state of Minnesota are not reaching pre-Covid levels and are on average about a year behind...or more in many cases. New Heights will continue to use Fastbridge testing as an evaluative tool for the foreseeable future.

(3) Formative assessments used to Inform Instruction:

**Action:** Teachers use tools such as exit slips, class polls, think pair share, short unit or lesson quizzes, popcorn questioning and others. Teachers try to establish that learning is taking place among all members of the class to ensure maximum growth among all students. When formative assessments provide appropriate data, teachers are better able to make day-to-day changes to instructional practices to maximize student outcomes.

(4) Reporting to the board on student performance.

**Action:** Each month there is a standing agenda item that ensures progress related to each goal from the contract is given. In some cases, various staff members will give a presentation because they have a direct role in helping to reach the goal. The board in conjunction with the administrator have monthly dialogue about how the board can continue to gather more useful types of information so that it may do its collective part to assist the faculty in reaching the school's contract goals.

In effort to gain more enrollment, New Heights will have a stronger presence within the community, collaborating with the district schools when possible, seeking involvement in county-level programming, having a stronger presence at local events, and working toward constructing an inclusive playground for the students of the school, but also for non-enrolled members of the local community. \*The playground has just been completed as of October 10 2024. In all, the school received somewhere in the area of \$450K for the project. This project brought about a lot of support from the local community, which certainly will bring awareness to the school and its programs.

Additionally, for the past several years the school's principal has participated in a panel discussion with the local school district and other local high school administrators to members of the Stillwater Chamber of Commerce to increase awareness of school choice options in the

area. This program has proven to be very beneficial in spreading the word about New Heights. The participants have expressed a great deal of interest in New Heights as a result. (2021)The school's leadership is currently exploring a possible collaboration with Head-Start to grow enrollment.

**Action:** Head Start has signed a lease agreement and currently occupies two rooms at New Heights as of July of 2022. This relationship would seemingly be ideal for both parties, but the hope for the school is to gain kindergarten enrollment over time as the Head Start families will gain a stronger understanding of the school and many of them would choose to keep their children on campus at New Heights for Kindergarten and beyond.

Head Start had its own problems and after 2 years of leasing rooms with New Heights decided to close the doors permanently to the Stillwater location. This had mostly to do with an inability to find licensed staff and also because the local district opened a competitive preschool program that lessened the need for a program like Head Start to exist in the area. Enrollment became a problem.

\*Material Weaknesses appearing in financial audits must be addressed.

Action: The two defined material weaknesses identified in prior audits will not be present by the end of the contract term, FY 23 or FY24.

### **NHS has a low fund balance.**

**Action:**

The Fund Balance for New Heights is sizable. As of 12/31/23 the fund balance was \$492,417. This area has been eliminated presently as a concern. As of 06/30/2024, the school's fund balance was **\$902,559**

Additionally, there was concern that recent financial audits had two items noted as deficiencies; the organization inherently has a limited segregation of duties in financial processes due to the school having a small administrative staff, and the school does not have a "qualified" staff member in-house to prepare and review the school's financial statements. Both items have been eliminated from the most recent audit-FY2022 as well as for 2023, and now for the 2024 Audit. It should be noted that despite the finding of limited segregation of duties, that particular finding is not uncommon; in fact, it is somewhat inherent within small organizations, including small, independent schools and small town governments that operate in a similar manner as New Heights, small non-profits, and even small local governments such as those which are found in rural areas of any state. As for the preparation of and review of the school's financial statements, the only people "qualified" to do these two things to satisfy a governmental audit are CPAs, and it is not feasible for small organizations to have these highly trained individuals on staff. The school's administration has formed a relationship with a qualified 3rd party partner to assist the school in this endeavor and has satisfied the auditor to amend the finding according to the 2 most recent audits.



**New Heights School, Inc.**  
 Stillwater, Minnesota  
 General Fund  
 Schedule of Revenues, Expenditures and Changes in Fund Balances -  
 Budget and Actual (Continued on the Following Page)  
 For the Year Ended June 30, 2024  
 (With Comparative Actual Amounts for the Year Ended June 30, 2023)

	2024			Variance With Final Budget	2023
	Budgeted Amounts		Actual		Actual
	Original	Final	Amounts		Amounts
<b>Revenues</b>					
Other local revenue	\$ 5,775	\$ 5,775	\$ 513,845	\$ 508,070	\$ 69,668
Interest earned on investments	75	75	63	(12)	39
Revenue from state sources	1,646,544	1,646,544	1,588,306	(58,238)	1,557,276
Revenue from federal sources	68,000	68,000	84,219	16,219	169,166
Total Revenues	<u>1,720,394</u>	<u>1,720,394</u>	<u>2,186,433</u>	<u>466,039</u>	<u>1,796,149</u>
<b>Expenditures</b>					
<b>Current</b>					
<b>Administration</b>					
Salaries	85,000	85,000	89,250	(4,250)	87,338
Fringe benefits	18,045	18,045	17,460	585	16,782
Purchased services	49,000	49,000	49,824	(824)	48,079
Supplies and materials	100	100	-	100	-
Other	4,100	4,100	5,607	(1,507)	6,315
Total administration	<u>156,245</u>	<u>156,245</u>	<u>162,141</u>	<u>(5,896)</u>	<u>158,514</u>
<b>District Support Services</b>					
Salaries	55,350	55,350	58,833	(3,483)	97,850
Fringe benefits	20,865	20,865	19,318	1,547	32,952
Purchased services	29,350	29,350	35,639	(6,289)	46,464
Supplies and materials	3,100	3,100	1,926	1,174	2,109
Other	9,790	9,790	3,452	6,338	10,025
Total district support services	<u>118,455</u>	<u>118,455</u>	<u>119,168</u>	<u>(713)</u>	<u>189,400</u>
<b>Elementary and secondary regular instruction</b>					
<b>regular instruction</b>					
Salaries	495,551	495,551	481,016	14,535	460,319
Fringe benefits	113,821	113,821	104,180	9,641	107,283
Purchased services	8,347	8,347	12,630	(4,283)	4,307
Supplies and materials	5,900	5,900	12,995	(7,095)	15,507
Other	2,653	2,653	-	2,653	-
Total elementary and secondary regular instruction	<u>626,272</u>	<u>626,272</u>	<u>610,821</u>	<u>15,451</u>	<u>587,416</u>
<b>Special education instruction</b>					
Salaries	229,350	229,350	218,347	11,003	223,811
Fringe benefits	40,519	40,519	35,500	5,019	37,814
Purchased services	102,239	102,239	115,544	(13,305)	116,010
Supplies and materials	1,350	1,350	2,726	(1,376)	2,517
Other	1,000	1,000	-	1,000	-
Total special education instruction	<u>374,458</u>	<u>374,458</u>	<u>372,117</u>	<u>2,341</u>	<u>380,152</u>

**New Heights School, Inc.**  
 Stillwater, Minnesota  
 General Fund  
 Schedule of Revenues, Expenditures and Changes in Fund Balances -  
 Budget and Actual (Continued)  
 For the Year Ended June 30, 2024  
 (With Comparative Actual Amounts for the Year Ended June 30, 2023)

	2024				2023
	Budgeted Amounts		Actual Amounts	Variance With Final Budget	Actual Amounts
	Original	Final			
Expenditures (Continued)					
Current (continued)					
Instructional support services					
Purchased services	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 160	\$ (160)	\$ -
Pupil support services					
Salaries	37,700	37,700	13,981	23,719	20,982
Fringe benefits	6,511	6,511	5,838	673	7,376
Purchased services	2,776	2,776	-	2,776	3,116
Supplies and materials	2,275	2,275	1,118	1,157	1,155
Other	92	92	-	92	-
Total pupil support services	<u>49,354</u>	<u>49,354</u>	<u>20,937</u>	<u>28,417</u>	<u>32,629</u>
Sites and buildings					
Salaries	2,500	2,500	175	2,325	253
Fringe benefits	379	379	26	353	38
Purchased services	94,880	94,880	78,782	16,098	101,463
Supplies and materials	5,000	5,000	82,880	(77,880)	11,978
Total sites and buildings	<u>102,759</u>	<u>102,759</u>	<u>161,863</u>	<u>(59,104)</u>	<u>113,732</u>
Fiscal and other fixed cost programs					
Purchased services	<u>12,200</u>	<u>12,200</u>	<u>16,573</u>	<u>(4,373)</u>	<u>15,025</u>
Total current	<u>1,439,743</u>	<u>1,439,743</u>	<u>1,463,780</u>	<u>(24,037)</u>	<u>1,476,868</u>
Capital outlay					
District support	-	-	-	-	1,292
Elementary and secondary regular instruction	-	-	3,660	(3,660)	7,375
Sites and buildings	-	-	67,953	(67,953)	6,630
Total capital outlay	<u>-</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>71,613</u>	<u>(71,613)</u>	<u>15,297</u>
Debt service					
Principal	108,055	108,055	105,789	2,266	98,816
Interest	124,657	124,657	124,657	-	127,772
Total debt service	<u>232,712</u>	<u>232,712</u>	<u>230,446</u>	<u>2,266</u>	<u>226,588</u>
Total Expenditures	<u>1,672,455</u>	<u>1,672,455</u>	<u>1,765,839</u>	<u>(93,384)</u>	<u>1,718,753</u>
Net Change in Fund Balances	47,939	47,939	420,594	372,655	77,396
Fund Balances, July 1	<u>481,965</u>	<u>481,965</u>	<u>481,965</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>404,569</u>
Fund Balances, June 30	<u>\$ 529,904</u>	<u>\$ 529,904</u>	<u>\$ 902,559</u>	<u>\$ 372,655</u>	<u>\$ 481,965</u>

New Heights School, Inc.  
 Stillwater, Minnesota  
 Balance Sheet  
 Governmental Funds  
 June 30, 2024

	General	Food Service	Total
<b>Assets</b>			
Cash and temporary investments	\$ 956,775	\$ 11,866	\$ 968,641
Accounts receivable	182	-	182
Due from the Department of Education	92,446	-	92,446
Due from Federal government	56,067	-	56,067
Prepaid items	7,165	-	7,165
Total Assets	\$ 1,112,635	\$ 11,866	\$ 1,124,501
<b>Liabilities</b>			
Accounts and other payables	\$ 4,050	\$ -	\$ 4,050
Accrued salaries payable	175,265	-	175,265
Due to other school districts	30,761	-	30,761
Total Liabilities	210,076	-	210,076
<b>Fund Balances</b>			
Nonspendable for prepaid items	7,165	-	7,165
Restricted for			
Food service	-	11,866	11,866
Library aid	20,000	-	20,000
Student support	20,000	-	20,000
Assigned for			
Playground equipment	506,530	-	506,530
Unassigned	348,864	-	348,864
Total Fund Balance	902,559	11,866	914,425
Total Liabilities and Fund Balances	\$ 1,112,635	\$ 11,866	\$ 1,124,501

## Financial Summary

For most of its existence, New Heights has shown to be very fiscally responsible, as evidenced by each of the official annual audit reports; particularly in years with lower than expected enrollment. The past three years, despite issues that coincide with the pandemic, the school was able to make substantial improvement to the fund balance. At the end of FY 2024, the school's fund balance was **\$902,559**

Any comments, questions, or concerns about the contents of this report should be directed to the school's principal, Thomas Kearney, at:

New Heights School

614 West Mulberry Street

Stillwater, MN 55082

Phone: 651-439-1962

E-mail: [tkearney@newheightsschool.org](mailto:tkearney@newheightsschool.org) Website: [www.newheightsschool.com](http://www.newheightsschool.com)