

## **New Charter School (NCS): General Summary**

*(as conceived by Greg Callaham)*

NCS employs a relationship-based model where we explicitly teach students from historically underrepresented groups the social-emotional skills they need to handle the obstacles that their outside lives put in front of them, so that they are better able to make academics a priority. We then incorporate a student-centered, collaborative learning design philosophy to create, test, iterate, and improve upon our academic classroom teaching practices to give students the skills they need to be able to open up opportunities to make any career decisions that best suit them in an unknown future. And strong community and career connections give students real-world work experience, letting them know - without doubt - that they can be successful in any professional field, and in their personal lives, as well.

### **Student Demographics:**

To more effectively describe the work NCS does, we have to begin with the students - as we do with every decision and process we undergo. Our goal is not to simply “close the achievement gap” as so many other schools strive for, but to go beyond that - giving historically underrepresented and underserved youth access to opportunities that students at other schools do not have. Therefore, our primary demographic are first-generation college attendees who come from low SES communities in the East Bay. However, we also believe that being able to effectively communicate and connect with people from diverse backgrounds and to thrive within different cultural contexts is necessary to true success professionally and personally, so our doors are open to all students from surrounding communities, and we will recruit beyond our “target” demographic - while staying largely within close local proximity to the school.

### **Faculty Demographics:**

We at NCS believe strongly that to successfully reach and benefit historically underserved students, we must do everything in our power to break down damaging stereotypes that keep our students from truly believing that they can be successful in this country while simultaneously retaining strong ties to their communities, family culture, and personal identities. Therefore, we will strive to have school leaders and faculty that strongly represent our students - in terms of race, ethnicity, SES, gender, orientation, and any other relevant demographic - so that students regularly see adults that are “like them” demonstrating mastery of the skills and tools we strive to bring to our youth. Of course, we will also make sure to have a balance of faculty that come from completely different backgrounds from our youth, so that they continue to grow and learn from different perspectives and cultures - and so that our NCS campus is representative of the world we would like our students to build towards in the future. We will also regularly have community members and non-education professionals working with our students within and outside of our school walls.

### **Core Values:**

NCS’s general design is developed to maximize on the following core values:

- Explicit social-emotional skill development relevant to our population's daily experience
- A self-reflective, iterative learning design teaching culture to give our students the most effective, engaging learning experiences possible
- Removing barriers between non-education professionals and educators - in the classroom, and outside of school - for students and teachers
- Using our school as a community hub for community outreach and uplift, as driven and developed by our students

**General Schedule:**

Every day begins in students' Advocate groups: cross-grade-level peer groups with one lead adult staff member. Our thirty-minute Advocate time every morning serves as a touchstone for our students - a place where each and every one of them can come in, share who they are and where they are at, and explicitly learn relevant social-emotional skills to help them support themselves, each other, and find outside supports and resources when they are facing problems in or out of school. Advocate groups will help each other set relevant goals and achieve them, as well as offering each other support when any given member is struggling in any way. The lead staff member is the first line of contact between all of their Advocate group students and families, communicating regularly with every family about the successes of their students, as well as their struggles. The Advocate Leader will also serve as a mentor to their Advocate students, helping them problem-solve when they are struggling in classes, as well as coaching students to communicate with other staff members when there are issues. Every Advocate Leader will undergo extensive training in strength-based social-emotional skill-building with youth to enable them to make the most out of the Advocate time.

From their Advocate classes, students go to their morning core skills classes, where they practice basic-level academic skills, focusing on reading, writing, social studies and math. These core skills classes are taught and developed by Learning Design teams - cross-disciplinary teams of classroom teachers that design and run their curriculum together. Core skills classes will be taught through a blend of traditional group teaching, experiential learning activities, and skills-focused digital learning technologies, dependent on the Learning Design teams' discretion. Curriculum and lesson plans will be developed through an iterative design process, with regular adjustment based on student feedback and outcomes' assessments (such as daily exit tickets and knowledge-checks, with limited reliance on standardized tests).

In the afternoons, students will participate in cross-discipline projects developed by the same Learning Design teams leading their morning classes. These projects will be designed to represent real-world work, while simultaneously reinforcing many of the core skills developed in the morning classes, and including Science, Art and Design skills elements. Learning Design teams will place a priority on including outside community members and non-education

professionals in the design and implementation of these projects whenever possible.

Our extended day programming will be open to all of our students, with mandatory participation in at least one trimester of our Community Development projects. The Community Development projects will focus on tightening the connection between our school and our local community, with students targeting issues in their community and developing their own solutions. The most practical and effective solutions will then become part of our Community Hub Programming - when we open parts of our school to outside community members to come in and take advantage of resources, workshops, and other offerings to our non-student community, guided by our students and staff.

Extended day programming will also consist of a handful of “Learning Lab” classes led on a rotating basis by our regular-day faculty. These Learning Labs will be spaces for teachers to test out innovative educational practices and prototype lessons with student participants (but without the risk of losing regular-day class time when some attempts fail). Students will not be graded for these classes, but they will receive positive incentives for their participation.

Finally, every Wednesday will be a full day of “Elective” classes. These classes will consist of an array of enrichment courses based on our teachers’ personal passions with participation from outside community organizations and professionals. The only Elective class that will necessarily remain consistent throughout the school year will be a programming course that all students will participate in one trimester per year, every year that they are enrolled at NCS.

### **Learning Design:**

To enable our teachers to design the best lessons and projects possible for our students, there will be consistent collaborative planning time built in for one hour every morning. Every-other Wednesday will also be on a shortened schedule, giving our staff more time for whole-group professional development opportunities, as well as additional group planning time, on occasion. Teachers will share central offices, so that this co-location will naturally lead to more informal collaborations and sharing of ideas.

Finally, NCS will adhere to a year-round scheduling model consisting of three trimesters, with one month off between each trimester. The final week of each of these breaks will be work-time for our teachers, with students still out of the building. This will provide further opportunities for Learning Design teams to fine-tune and iterate their lessons, as well as opening up blocks of time to develop significant relationships and shared planning time with outside professionals.

### **Location:**

NCS will be located in Richmond, CA, a part of the Bay Area with high crime rates, poverty, and a significant population of first-generation college attendees and recent immigrants to the U.S. Specifically, NCS will be a few blocks outside of the “Iron Triangle” neighborhood - an area that is known as the heart of the Richmond African-American community, as well for its high crime rate. Locating close to, but slightly outside of, the Iron Triangle neighborhood will make NCS conveniently accessible to some of Richmond’s most underserved students, as well as keeping us close to a community in need of the support our Community Hub model can

provide. This area also includes a portion of the downtown Richmond business district, giving us similarly convenient access to local businesses and community organizations. This location should best enable us access to the resources we need, while being readily-accessible to our target student demographic, as well as students from different backgrounds to fill out the diversity of our school.

**Governance:**

NCS is a public charter school, and a 501(c)3 non-profit organization. We are governed by a 5-person board made up of local community members and business professionals. Our founding Administrative team consists of three Directors: a Director of School Culture, Director of Academic Design, and Director of Community Engagement. While all three Directors will share responsibilities for general school logistics and staff supervision and evaluation, each will be the primary lead (with final “veto power”) in their domain. These Directors will share one office, with a small meeting room attached when private conversations and meetings are necessary. On top of leading an Advocate group, every Director will also teach one elective class per trimester, freeing up a rotating group of teachers to have more planning time on Wednesdays.

Finally, teaching faculty will have opportunities to take on management and mentorship opportunities within the school, encouraging long-term commitment to our program and lowering teacher turnover.