

New Horizons Charter School
Sherwood Park, AB

Charter School Evaluation Report
March 2024

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I. INTRODUCTION

Background

Established in 1995 by the Education for the Gifted Society of Strathcona County, the New Horizons Charter School embarked on its journey to provide academically gifted students with an environment conducive to achieving excellence. Initially operating under Elk Island Public Schools Regional Division No. 14, the school opened its doors at the Park Professional Centre in Sherwood Park. However, due to space constraints and other limitations, including a lack of playground space and noise complaints from neighboring tenants, New Horizons relocated to Spruce Avenue in 1997. This move provided a larger space to accommodate its growing student population and offered improved facilities.

In its formative years, New Horizons experienced organizational changes and relocations as it navigated various challenges. In 1999-2000, the school began reporting directly to the Alberta Minister of Education after the Elk Island Public Schools Board decided not to renew its charter, citing concerns with charter school legislation and regulations. Subsequently, the society underwent a name change, rebranding itself as the New Horizons Charter School Society in 2001. This period also marked a shift in the school’s governance and operational structure as it transitioned to direct reporting to the provincial education authority.

In 2008, the school faced another relocation when the building lease with the Robin Hood Association was not renewed. New Horizons moved to Ardrossan, where it operated in a shared facility with Ardrossan Elementary School. Despite challenges posed by shared amenities and space limitations, the school continued its mission of providing a quality education to its students. However, in 2015, the school realized its longstanding aspiration of finding a permanent location in Sherwood Park with its relocation to the former St. Theresa Catholic School facility. Renovations and improvements followed, and the school’s enrolment grew substantially, reaching 350 students by September 2018. Major modernization occurred from 2016 to 2017, with a Grand Re-opening Celebration in 2018.

New Horizons Charter School is in the 12th year of their current 15-year charter. The term of the current charter is from September 1, 2012, to August 31, 2027.

Student Enrolment

New Horizons Charter School enrolment in the past 12 years since their last charter renewal.

	ECS	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Total
2012/2013	22	21	22	21	22	24	24	24	15	11	206
2013/2014	23	23	22	23	21	23	22	18	21	14	210
2014/2015	32	22	21	23	23	20	24	19	18	18	220
2015/2016	36	42	26	22	24	24	20	20	18	18	250
2016/2017	33	44	43	30	31	24	24	17	16	12	274
2017/2018	37	38	46	45	37	39	22	25	16	12	317
2018/2019	39	43	39	46	47	40	45	19	22	12	352
2019/2020	34	44	47	42	50	48	42	40	21	22	390
2020/2021	38	43	44	46	45	48	47	36	38	21	406
2021/2022	37	45	43	46	47	48	42	51	34	33	426

2022/2023	31	43	44	43	48	45	48	39	52	34	427
2023/2024	36	42	44	45	48	48	47	44	39	51	444

Facilities

In 2015, New Horizons Charter Schools (NHCS) relocated to a new facility, utilizing a government-provided renovation budget to update the school premises. The modernization project was managed by Alberta Infrastructure and completed in 2017. The school now operates within a permanent structure leased from Elk Island Catholic Schools, formerly known as St. Theresa Catholic School.

The modernization project included the removal of 14 older portables, and installation of six new modular classrooms. Since then, another four modular classrooms have been added to accommodate their growing student population. Despite these additions, their total classroom utilization rate has grown to 112% which is further increased when considering shared facilities such as the gymnasium, placing additional strain on the school's resources.

As of the evaluation date, NHCS shares its site with Ecole Claudette-et-Denis-Tardiff (ECDT) school, with ECDT's modular units situated on the same school site but detached from the main building. Shared resources include the gymnasium and playground, as well as janitorial services, maintenance, utilities, and property repairs.

In addition to partnerships with neighboring school districts, NHCS collaborates with the County of Strathcona, ECDT, Friends of New Horizons Charter School, and the provincial government on various initiatives. Notably, they have worked together to acquire and install a new playground benefiting both schools and the wider community.

Staff

New Horizons Charter School employs 38 staff (with a total Full Time Equivalent is 36.53). Current F.T.E. (F.T.E. – Full Time Equivalent) as of March 8, 2024 (provided by New Horizons Charter School) is:

- Superintendent 0.6 F.T.E.
- Secretary-Treasurer 1.0 F.T.E.
- Administrators 2.0 F.T.E.
- Teaching Staff of 21.93 F.T.E.
- Educational Assistants 8.0 F.T.E.
- Administrative Assistants 2.86 F.T.E.
- Library Assistant 0.14 F.T.E.
- Director of Student Services is staffed through contracted services.
- Custodian services are staffed through contracted services.

Vision

New Horizons School will enable gifted students to strive for excellence in a positive academic learning environment that fosters social and emotional support for each student.

Mission

The mission of New Horizons Charter School is to meet the special academic needs of gifted learners in a congregated setting in an environment that is low-anxiety, positive, and supportive of

the individual. Gifted students need opportunities to be challenged, to think alternatively, and to pursue learning according to their own learning styles.

Philosophy and Educational Foundations

The New Horizons Charter School Society recognizes that gifted students have special education needs that may go beyond programs offered in regular school programs. New Horizons School provides qualitatively differentiated programming in a congregated setting through customized and individualized programs that address students' unique abilities, achievements, learning styles, interests, and needs. Program differentiation encompasses administrative and organizational strategies, curriculum enrichment, instructional methodologies, learning environment, and assessment strategies.

Charter Goals

The overarching goal of our program is to facilitate student growth and development in three main areas: academically, socially, and emotionally. In accordance with Alberta Education's requirements related to student learning and meeting the needs of gifted students, the following goals and outcomes have been established to address the three goal areas mentioned above.

Students at New Horizons will demonstrate the following outcomes in the context of the three program goals:

Goal 1: Student learning is improved.

Outcome 1: Students will demonstrate mastery of learner outcomes mandated by the Alberta academic curriculum.

Outcome 2: Students will become creative risk-takers academically.

Goal 2: Students benefit from opportunities for inclusive, positive social interactions.

Outcome 1: Students will develop positive interdependence skills.

Outcome 2: Students will become creative risk-takers socially.

Goal 3: Students' emotional needs are supported.

Outcome 1: Students will develop independence, self-direction, and self-discipline in learning.

Outcome 2: Students will become creative risk-takers emotionally.

New Horizons School will undertake to:

1. Establish an enhanced, inclusive educational program tailored to the unique education needs of gifted learners;
2. Establish a program that may include such practices as acceleration, extension, enrichment and curriculum compacting so that each student is challenged to perform to potential;
3. Provide learning activities that stimulate students to meaningfully extend their knowledge and skills beyond the requirements of Alberta Education in keeping with student interest and capabilities;
4. Promote specific projects geared to individual student interests and abilities while focusing on in-depth research and the development of strong presentation skills;
5. Provide students with opportunities to experience learning in a variety of ways;

6. Foster an inclusive environment that allows students to recognize and accept their own capabilities, interests and needs while also recognizing, accepting and appreciating the needs and achievements of others;
7. Provide a learning environment that promotes student use of critical and complex thinking and proactive decision-making skills;
8. Create and maintain a safe and caring learning and social environment for all students;
9. Assess student outcomes by using a variety of criteria that may include self-appraisal, teacher-designed assessments, criterion referenced and standardized instruments; and
10. Foster on-going professional development to enable school staff to enhance their ability to meet the needs of gifted students, i.e., building instructional and leadership capacity as well as educational technology innovation.

Goal and Outcome Measurement

New Horizons demonstrates attainment of its goals and anticipated outcomes through the use of consistent and predetermined measures (Education Plan, AERR). Provincial achievement data is used to analyze levels of student mastery of Alberta curriculum learner outcomes – see Goal 1, Outcome 1.

The affective elements of student learning and social/emotional achievements (Goals 1, 2 and 3) are measured using pre-established data that are systematically gathered and include the perceptions of stakeholders including students, staff, and parents. Annual education planning will determine which measures are most effective in determining progress toward the attainment of the intended outcomes stated in the charter.

Terms of Reference

The *Charter Schools Regulation* requires that all charter schools in the province be evaluated at least once in the term of their charter. There are a number of purposes for the evaluation of a charter school:

1. To provide evidence to the Minister and the board that the charter school is in compliance with provincial requirements and the requirements of the Charter, inclusive of charter amendments, approved by the Minister.
2. To report to staff, parents, and the community on the success of the charter school and to identify areas of strength and areas that may require additional attention.
3. To focus the attention of the board and staff on the goals and objectives of the Charter and the need to establish and confirm measurable outcomes and measures.
4. To facilitate continuous improvement in the charter school consistent with the assurance requirements of the Ministry and with the local direction established by the charter school community and authorized by the board of directors.

The criteria by which the charter school is evaluated are:

1. The charter authority meets the terms and conditions of its charter and has performance measures that show clear evidence of success.
2. The charter authority operates in a manner consistent with all applicable provincial requirements.

3. The charter authority is governed effectively.
4. The charter authority is administered effectively.
5. The charter authority is financially viable and responsible.
6. The students, parents, staff, school council and community members consider the school program to be successful.
7. Student success is determined in accordance with Ministerial Order (#028/2020)
8. The charter authority shares its innovative practices and learning outcomes with others in the educational community.
9. Student achievement at the charter school is consistently strong or improving.
10. The charter authority is committed to engaging students, teachers, parents, and community members in a model of continuous improvement.
11. The charter authority reaches out beyond its walls to demonstrate broad and sustained levels of community engagement.
12. The charter authority uses research-informed practices to create innovative learning environments and improve student learning.

Evaluation Process

The findings of the evaluation were established using the following processes and activities:

1. The charter school was asked to develop and submit to Alberta Education a self-evaluation report based on the 12 criteria named above. (See Appendix page 19)
2. Alberta Education established a team of five individuals to review the self-evaluation report submitted by the school and to determine appropriate school site evaluation processes.
3. During the two-day onsite meeting process with the Alberta Education five-member team, focus group sessions were established to provide opportunities for the board, superintendent, principal, teachers and staff, students, and parents to share insights about the school's successes and ideas about how the charter school might become even more effective.
 - One focus group session with students was conducted.
 - Individual interviews were conducted with the superintendent, principal/vice-principal, and secretary-treasurer.
 - One focus group session with teachers was conducted.
 - One focus group session with support staff was conducted.
 - One focus group session with board members was conducted.
 - One focus group session with parents was conducted. This group included representatives from the School Council.
4. Evaluation team members participated in classroom observations throughout grades K-9 to observe instruction, the design of student learning activities and student engagement. While debriefing these classroom observations, individual impromptu conversations were held with teachers and support staff.

II. EVALUATION CONCLUSIONS, COMMENDATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND REQUIRED CHANGES:

1. The charter authority meets the terms and conditions of its charter and has performance measures that show clear evidence of success.

New Horizons has been an established school of choice since 1995 to meet the special academic needs of gifted learners. New Horizons Charter School renewed their charter in March of 2012. They used a stakeholder consultation process to examine foundational statements, mission, vision, and key elements, and to clarify charter goals. They examined which actions and measures could bring more focus to the way New Horizons Charter School supports students. Documents submitted incorporated amendments to the charter that more clearly communicate the methods and strategies used in the school and classrooms to support the needs of gifted learners and that describe an updated and expanded research base for the school's areas of focus.

New Horizons Charter School's current goals are focused on student growth and development in three main areas: academically, socially, and emotionally. Stakeholder engagement and staff professional development is ongoing in a spirit of evolution and growth. The charter has evolved to include meeting the needs of an increased number of twice-exceptional learners over the years. Stakeholders clearly understand the charter and can articulate their understanding effectively. Student and parent focus groups universally described that the charter fit the learning needs of gifted students.

Required change:

Charter Update: That New Horizons engage with stakeholders in accordance with the school's charter amendment process to update the school's charter and create a stand-alone charter document that aligns with the 2022 Charter Schools Regulation prior to requesting a charter renewal in the 2026/27 school year. The charter amendment process may be an exercise on its own or may accompany the charter renewal request to be submitted prior to December 1, 2026.

The charter amendment process should include a review of:

- the vision, purpose, charter goals, and foundational statements to ensure alignment throughout;
- the way measurable outcomes are expressed for each charter goal; and
- all other elements of the charter, ensuring that all requirements in Section 4 of the regulation are addressed and align with the school's vision and purpose.

The department will provide support in reviewing the draft charter document should New Horizons request feedback prior to submitting charter amendments to the Minister. When the charter amendments are approved, the charter is to be posted on the school's website.

2. The charter authority operates in a manner consistent with all applicable provincial requirements.

New Horizons Charter School follows the Alberta Programs of Study and provides access to the required amount of instructional time. Regular monitoring of the school by Alberta Education staff confirms its coherence with Ministry expectations. The school complies with Alberta Education planning, reporting, and funding requirements in providing timely information, including annual reports to Alberta Education and stakeholders, examples being the Education Plan and Annual Education Results Report. Active school council involvement

was noted. Clear evidence of stakeholder engagement and opportunities for parental involvement referenced by all stakeholders.

Commendation:

- The school demonstrates a concerted effort to ensure the FNMI calls to action are referenced and shared throughout the school.

3. The charter authority is governed effectively.

The board provides stability with a mix of long-serving and newer members. As new members join the board, board training has been available to support members in their roles. There is a collaborative working relationship between the school administration and the board, partly attributed to long-serving staff members who have been part of the school community for many years. The school is in the process of acclimating new team members with the addition of a new superintendent in July 2023, along with new Board members in the fall of 2023.

The board has developed policies, procedures, and oversight, along with a Code of Conduct for Board Members. The board has a process for regular review and amendment of policies. The New Horizons School Charter, their policy handbook, capital plans and board meeting minutes are all posted on the school's website.

Commendation:

- A clear governance structure between the Board, Superintendent and School Administration was evident.

4. The charter authority is administered effectively.

The administration demonstrates a commitment to ensure effective operational procedures and practices are followed to meet their charter commitments. The Principal and Vice-Principal provide a strong team approach in supporting all staff to lead the vision of the school in meeting the unique needs of academically gifted learners. A mutually respectful working relationship was observed throughout the onsite observations and meetings during the charter evaluation process by the Alberta Education Charter Evaluation Team between the administration and students, staff, and parents.

A safe and caring environment was referenced by all stakeholders, particularly the students, who shared that teachers work hard to accommodate every student and are respectful of individual differences and learning styles. The school has made use of every space in their building, including the recent additions of the makerspace and outdoor classroom. Students referred to these spaces as opportunities to use different spaces in the school to optimize their learning. The school also has a vibrant Gay-Straight Alliance and there are many references throughout the building regarding inclusivity and belonging. Stakeholders expressed confidence and respect for the superintendent and administration team. Lastly, parents and students expressed appreciation for the support they receive from school administration, teachers, and support staff.

Commendation:

- The organization of a shared Math instructional time throughout the school in order to accommodate students learning opportunities by moving them up grade levels when they are ready for a challenge.

5. The charter authority is fiscally viable and responsible.

Through a review of their financial reporting and on-site meetings, New Horizons Charter School has demonstrated they are fiscally viable and responsible. Their approach to strategic planning involving the expertise of their board trustees and continual quarterly review of budgets and financial statements with the board is an example of their responsible approach to fiscal management and practices. The administration expressed the strong working relationships of the trustees and administration staff been vital to the success of New Horizons Charter School operations.

The board of trustees has cultivated beneficial relationships in the community and with other local boards, which have allowed the school to maintain consistent enrollment demand in their community, and share costs that otherwise would not be feasible for the board to incur on their own. Two examples of this are contracting Elk Island Public to transport their students and sharing a gym space with the public school beside their school site. In addition to this New Horizons Charter School spoke to the depth of knowledge and experience of both the Secretary Treasurer and the Superintendent. Both the individuals in these positions have many years of experience in larger public boards in Alberta and leveraged their expertise while working collaboratively with each other to bring best practices to this charter operations.

Being a smaller school in a large metropolitan area has created some fiscal pressures that were indicated by the school's secretary treasurer. New Horizons Charter School is aware of their fiscal pressures and is planning and conducting a value scope to provide evidence that expansion for their programming is feasible and the demand will match the growth goals they have identified. In their current state the school should be commended for their ability to share resources with other boards in their area to meet the needs of their students. Other financial pressures indicated by the charter are insurance, utilities, professional development, and inflationary pressures. This charter is commended for being cognizant of the different fiscal pressures effecting their finances and developing relationships with The Association of Alberta Public Charter School to find cost efficiencies in their operations.

The last three years of financial audits shows that New Horizons Charter School is managing its finances effectively. New Horizons Charter School has also shown a positive accumulated surplus from operation over the last three years. They have projected a deficit in the current school year but have been deliberate about using these funds to address their infrastructure concerns and have adequately planned this venture while taking steps to ensure they get back into a positive position. Enrolment has decreased by 4% in the 2023/24 school year and New Horizons Charter School has adjusted its certificated staffing Full Time Equivalent (FTE's) accordingly to keep a consistent ratio of students to certificated staff.

New Horizons Charter School's Budget Surplus (Deficit) Summary for the last four years is as follows:

	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023
Actual Expenses	\$3,822,891	\$4,099,219	\$4,580,098	\$5,037,638
Budgeted Expenses	\$4,147,508	\$4,327,810	\$4,342,045	\$4,942,148
Accumulated Surplus (Deficit) From Operations (total unrestricted surplus + total operating reserves – the school generated funds)	\$730,477	\$819,784	\$929,944	\$606,190

Commendations:

- The charter authority is commended for the responsible stewardship of its finances.
- The charter authority’s commitment to their student-centered approach to decision making has allowed them to find creative practice in learning backed by good fiscal practices.

Recommendation:

- New Horizons Charter School to continue to work closely with Alberta Education Capital Planning and School Finance staff to address facility planning, lease costs, and desired expansion.

6. The students, parents, staff, school council(s), and community members consider the school to be successful.

Staff and teachers find the school welcoming and accepting of all students, fostering a nurturing environment where everyone feels valued and supported. They express appreciation for the school’s support of their roles and the transparent communication regarding important decisions, creating a collaborative atmosphere for professional growth and development.

Feedback from stakeholders highlights the unique sense of community fostered at the school. They believe that it is more than just a school; it is a caring and inclusive community where everyone is welcomed. Parents particularly appreciate the school’s accommodation of neurodiversity and the various options available for gifted students, ensuring that every child’s unique needs are met.

Communication between the school and parents was referenced often, with employees being described as reachable and respectful. Parents feel valued and heard, with the school actively seeking and valuing their feedback. Additionally, parents noted that the school’s encouragement of parental involvement through volunteering enhances the overall sense of community belonging.

Students echo the sentiments of satisfaction and success, citing their appreciation for the supportive and collaborative environment provided by their teachers. They feel empowered to pursue their academic goals and challenges, with teachers readily available for extra help and guidance.

Commendation:

- Dedication to accommodating neurodiversity and providing tailored support to each and every student.

7. Student success is determined in accordance with Ministerial Order (#028/2020).

New Horizons Charter School has embraced the foundation of the Ministerial Order in their focus on literacy and numeracy. The commitment of the school to this Ministerial Order is also evident in their approach to professional learning and development by teachers and administration, and through their efforts and success in engaging stakeholders.

As each student who attends New Horizons has an Individualized Program Plan, every student has individualized programming that also encourages the development of their unique interests. A strong focus on social-emotional learning is evident in daily programming, with a commitment on the provision of strategies to support students proactively in academic as well as extracurricular opportunities.

Commendations:

- The Ministerial Order on Student Learning (#28/2020) elements of character development and community engagement are aligned with the school's focus on conflict resolution and civil discourse, as was referenced often by staff and students.
- A concerted effort to provide additional Options classes based on student interest and engagement.

8. The charter authority shares its innovative practices and learning outcomes with the education community.

New Horizons Charter School engages in sharing its innovative practices and learning outcomes with the broader education community, encouraging collaboration and enhancing the educational landscape. Through various partnerships, stakeholder forums, professional development opportunities, and active participation in educational associations, the school actively contributes to the exchange of knowledge and best practices in education.

Annual stakeholder forums provide opportunities for engagement and involvement in the school's initiatives, ensuring stakeholders have a voice in shaping the school's practices and outcomes. Additionally, teachers are encouraged to attend conferences and training courses to learn about best practices for gifted education and subsequently share their learnings through internal seminars and presentations, fostering a culture of continuous learning and professional development within the school community.

While the school has made strides in collaborations with other schools and institutions, feedback from teachers highlights a desire for more extensive collaborations, recognizing the benefits of broader engagement and knowledge exchange.

Commendation:

- Commitment to providing opportunities for professional development, including conferences and training courses, and encouraging teachers to share their learnings internally, promoting a culture of ongoing growth and development.

Recommendation:

- Explore avenues to enhance formal and informal opportunities to share and gather research and best practices through conferences, publications, with other charter

schools, charter community, regional neighbouring school authorities, and the post-secondary educational community.

9. Student achievement is consistently strong or improving.

Overall, the school authority has demonstrated consistent student achievement in relation to the Provincial Achievement exams. A review of 2019 results with the most recent 2023 PAT results highlights continued strong results, despite the interruption due to Covid. The school authority's overall PAT results at the grade 6 and 9 levels exceed provincial averages at both the acceptable standard and the standard of excellence.

Based on interviews with students and classroom observations, students are treated as partners in their learning and have considerable knowledge of their learning strengths, preferences, and areas they require modification to programming or additional assistance. Interviews with staff also aligned with student comments relative to individualized programming for students. This level of strategic and intentional programming complements and supports the consistently strong academic achievement results.

Interviews with the Board highlighted their awareness of Goal 3: Students' Emotional Needs Are Supported. Board members indicated that considerable resources are being directed to support the emotional needs of students. While it was recognized that this emphasis on supporting the social-emotional needs may be reducing the amount of extension opportunities for some students, this targeted support is reported to enhance student success.

The school authority has strong relationships between the teachers, students, and parents. For the 2022/23 school year, Alberta Education Assurance Measures (AEAM) highlighted this success. For example, survey results identified that Education Quality was at 90.6% and Parental Involvement was at 90.9%. The strategic support of students was also evident in the school authority AEAMs reports under the section of Access to Supports and Services, where survey results highlighted 86.7% positive response rate, which was an improvement of 16.1% from the previous year.

Recommendation:

- In relation to the school authority administered survey results that are aligned to their Charter Goals, both the parent and student survey results highlight areas of strength and opportunities for growth.

10. The charter authority exhibits in multiple ways ongoing commitment to engaging students, teachers, parents, and community members in a model of continuous improvement.

To gather feedback from its stakeholders, the school authority administers surveys that are organized around their charter goals. These surveys are administered to the parents and students. The feedback allows the school authority to organize its future planning. One such example highlighted is in relation to Individualized Program Plan development. The school authority is also planning on engaging students through student focus groups. Another example of this invitation for input included gathering parental feedback regarding the school meeting the diverse needs of students.

The school authority has invested in the ongoing professional development of their staff. The staff highlighted the depth and breadth of their professional development opportunities. Areas included literacy development, social-emotional development through executive functioning and discovery learning. Staff demonstrated high levels of knowledge and

commitment to authentically embed their professional learning to support the diversity of learners they serve. This professional learning is further enhanced with their exploration of research related to gifted and talented learning.

Recommendation:

- Continuing to pursue partnerships, involvement and engagement of the broader education community and charter school authorities.

11. The charter authority works collaboratively with stakeholders and demonstrates broad and sustained levels of community engagement.

The superintendent shared his vision for the school community, and his interest in exploring the possibility of expanding the school to include high school programming. This is in alignment with the vision shared by the Board and that of the parent group we interviewed. Meetings have been established with Alberta Infrastructure, Alberta Education, and key community stakeholders to explore expansion of a high school program.

A new superintendent, and the addition of new Board members, has allowed the school authority to reflect on its charter goals, review existing Board processes and policies, and to work collaboratively to ensure the continuation of the charter mandate. Within this framework, the superintendent and board are committed to further enhancing the opportunities for increasing student success.

The school authority has created a culture of developing and maintaining organizational relationships that promote a positive atmosphere and a powerful sense of community. Interviews with the staff and students also highlighted the sense of community. Furthermore, the parents shared that there is ongoing communication inviting parents to be involved as partners in the school community.

The superintendent shared plans to explore potential expansion of the school to incorporate high school programming, a direction in line with the broader vision articulated by the Board and echoed by the parent group interviewed. Efforts have been initiated to engage Alberta Infrastructure, Alberta Education, and key community stakeholders in discussions regarding the feasibility of such an expansion.

Under new leadership, including a new superintendent and additional Board members, the school authority has undertaken a review of its charter goals, Board processes, and policies. Emphasis has been placed on collaborative efforts to uphold the charter mandate and enhance opportunities for student success, aligning with the organization's commitment to continual improvement. Additionally, stakeholders described a positive organizational culture characterized by strong community bonds and a supportive environment.

Recommendation:

- Continue to refine Board policies to ensure alignment with the charter goals and addressing the needs of the current student population.

12. The charter authority uses research-informed practices to create innovative learning environments and improve student learning.

The school's leadership and teachers expressed their commitment to leveraging research-informed practices to create innovative learning environments and enhance student learning outcomes. Through various initiatives and partnerships, the school actively integrates research findings into teaching practices, continuously enriching the learning experiences of its students.

The school and teachers prioritize the adoption of social and emotional learning (SEL) research and practices, recognizing the importance of supporting students' holistic development. Additionally, a focus on staying abreast of research and articles on gifted education reflects the school's endeavor to meet the unique needs of its students.

Recommendations:

- Focus on maximizing tangible outcomes from collaborations with researchers by establishing clear goals and mechanisms for measuring the impact of these partnerships on student learning outcomes.
- Continue to focus on innovation with respect to programming for gifted learners that is not currently available within local area public school authorities.

Conclusion

As a result of our evaluation processes, the Alberta Education Evaluation Team is satisfied that the New Horizons Charter School is meeting the requirements of legislation and regulations for charter schools. There is some variance in the degree to which the evaluation criteria are met. While this variance is reflected in the commendations, recommendations, and required changes identified in the body of this report. As New Horizons Charter School moves forward in its endeavour to provide the best possible education for students, it is encouraged to celebrate its successes, while implementing the recommendations and directions provided by the Alberta Education Evaluation team.

The Alberta Education Evaluation Team extends its sincere thanks to the board, administration, staff, students, and parents for their time, perspectives, insights, and hospitality.

APPENDIX

New Horizons Charter School's Self-Evaluation Report

December 2023

New Horizons Charter School

1000 Sherwood Drive

Sherwood Park, AB T8A 3R6

2023-24 Charter School Self-Evaluation

I. INTRODUCTION

Background

New Horizons Charter School (NHCS) is a publicly funded charter school. New Horizons Charter School Society is a non-profit society established under the Societies Act. The elected board of directors operates under the NHS bylaws, School Charter, School Act, and related provincial policies and regulations. The school was established in 1995 as Canada's first charter school, and the Charter was last renewed in February 2010. Since its inception, New Horizons School has experienced exponential growth and relocated four times to accommodate enrollment and programming growth.

Mission Statement

The mission of New Horizons Charter School is to meet the unique academic needs of neuro-diverse gifted learners in a congregated setting in an environment that is low anxiety, positive, and supportive of the individual. Gifted students need opportunities to be challenged, to think alternatively, and to pursue learning according to their learning styles.

Vision Statement

New Horizons School will enable gifted students to strive for excellence in a positive academic learning environment that fosters social and emotional support for each student.

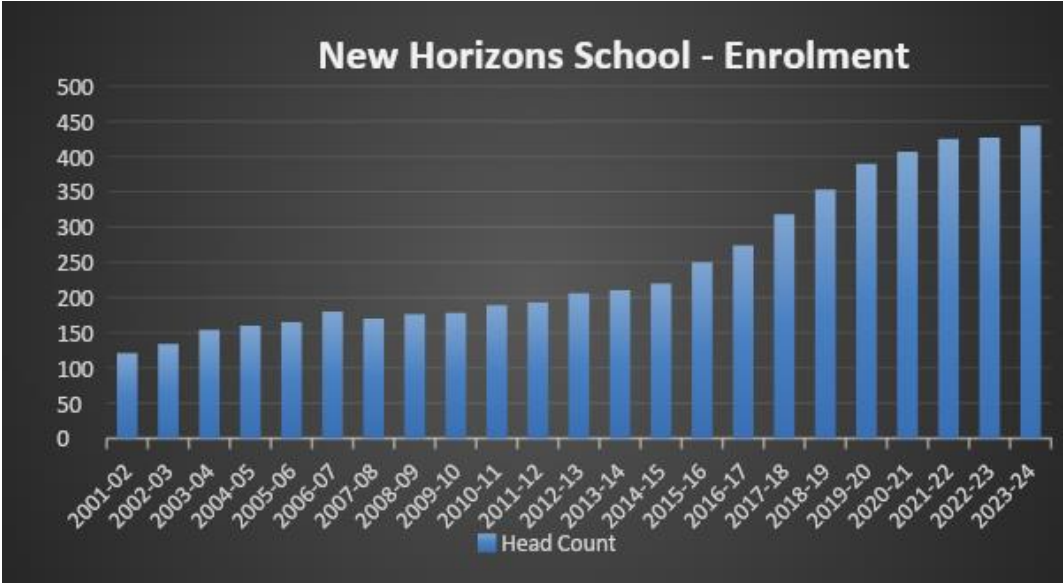
Philosophy and Educational Foundations

The New Horizons Charter School Society recognizes that gifted students have special education needs that may go beyond programs offered in regular school programs. New Horizons School provides qualitatively differentiated programming in a congregated setting through customized and individualized programs that address students' unique abilities, achievements, learning styles, interests, and needs. Program differentiation encompasses administrative and organizational strategies, curriculum enrichment, instructional methodologies, learning environment, and assessment strategies.

- **Charter Conditions:** The school meets the terms and conditions of its charter and has performance measures that show clear evidence of success.

New Horizons School has been and remains dedicated to developing and delivering programming for gifted students, which is intended to imbed the Alberta Programs of Study into an enhanced educational program tailored to the special education needs of gifted learners.

While the graph illustrates 20 years of growth, our average annual growth rate has been 11% per year over the last ten years, and we have increased 212% overall.



Considerable group work and project-oriented learning are occurring within the classrooms to enhance our educational program tailored to the special needs of gifted learners. The teachers utilize various methods to create the groups, including student choice, teacher-determined groups, and random selection of groups.

Providing learning activities that stimulate students to meaningfully extend their knowledge and skills beyond the requirements of Alberta Education in keeping with student interests and capabilities. The school utilizes a range of techniques that are appropriate for gifted learners. Instruction is balanced between teacher-directed whole-class learning and individualized instruction to meet student needs, incorporating differentiation of instruction and assessment in classrooms. Our program includes acceleration, extension, enrichment, and curriculum compacting so that each student is challenged to perform to potential; additional mathematics programming at the grade 10 level is introduced as an enrichment strategy despite our grade K to 9 programming configuration.

Teachers at New Horizons School triangulate assessment, allowing students to demonstrate their understanding of outcomes through formative and summative evaluation. Performance measures and provincial assessments, including locally administered CAT4 norm-referenced assessments and PATs, among other early-year assessments, continually demonstrate the student's high academic achievement. The standard of excellence has been continually double or triply higher than the provincial average.

New Horizons School has always fostered an environment of inclusivity, and discussions are varied and enriched. Through stakeholder forums in the past few years, students, parents, and staff have indicated civil discourse as a priority to recognize, accept, and appreciate the needs and differences. Providing students with opportunities to experience learning in various ways, outdoor classroom experiential learning, indigenous teachings, and makers spaces demonstrate different learning strategies.

- **Provincial Requirements:** The school operates consistently with all applicable provincial requirements.

The Annual Education Results Report for New Horizons Charter School Society is prepared under the direction of the Board of Directors in accordance with the responsibilities under the Education Act and the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act. The corporate body is in good standing under the *Societies Act* or the *Companies Act*. The Three-Year Education Plan, The Annual Education Results Reports (AERR), the Audited Financial Statements (AFS), and the Capital Plan have been completed. Occupational, Health, and Safety legislation and school safety protocols are updated annually with appropriate training while onboarding new staff.

New Horizons School Education Plan outlines priorities in alignment with the Alberta Education assurance framework, where goals are integrated into the assurance domains. Engagement occurs in various ways, from stakeholder engagements, provincial and board surveys, parent communication, volunteers, and individualized program planning. Staff professional growth and development plans through gifted research and collaboration with other charter school staff support continuous improvement. Outcomes are measured using local and provincial assessment tools.

- **Governance:** The Charter school is governed effectively. The Board uses the results in this report to improve student outcomes and ensure that all students in the school authority can acquire the knowledge, skills, and attitudes they need to be successful and contributing members of society.

The pace of social change is increasing rapidly, and it comes with increased demands for resilience and critical thinking, which are foundational to our charter. Our Board is aware of the ever-changing landscape and is committed to addressing the educational needs that contribute to developing citizenship. Governance by the Board of Directors is dedicated to overseeing strategic planning, financial advisory, and alignment of the charter mandate.

The Board adheres to charter bylaws, provincial legislation/regulations, emerging policy development, and strong stakeholder communication. Bylaws and policies govern our Board, and detailed minutes are recorded and verified.

As identified within the charter and capital plan, the fulfillment of a high school program remains incomplete. It has become the highest priority of the Board by establishing a high school ad hoc committee. The Board has directed the superintendent and secretary-treasurer to pursue all options and determine the best path in consultation with Alberta Education and Alberta Infrastructure.

The review of the Annual Education Results informs our board to make high-level decisions that impact student learning under the guidance of our charter mandate for gifted education. Board surveys and accountability measures are used to guide board decisions to impact learning outcomes. Stakeholders' forums are held annually to address priorities that focus on student learning in relation to civil discourse, citizenship, and other emerging topics.

The Board has been integral in relocating and expanding New Horizons School as enrollment growth has dictated the need for change and future considerations. In consecutive years over the past decade, the grade configuration has increased by one class each year, creating new demands for staffing, facility, and central office support. Future endeavors to include high school programming will challenge our board to seek resources and partnerships that fulfill this vision over the next three years.

- **Administration:** The school is administered effectively.

The school administration and staff in the early years of the Charter establishment comprised several part-time teachers and a part-time principal. The school expanded to two full-time administrators, over 20 professional staff, ten support staff, and an extended school authority office. With an initial enrollment of 76 students and a current enrollment of 446 students, the

impact of a proposed high school program will undoubtedly increase our enrollment projections, placing new demands on the administration, the board, and the system. This is evidence of our rate of growth and the need to engage all stakeholders. Future planning includes formal high school programming to serve the demands of our students and parents. There is no current solution for high school gifted programming in the region, which is the impetus for our expansion plan.

Establishing admission criteria for a school dedicated to gifted and talented students presents formidable challenges and potentially substantial costs. Eligibility mandates necessitate students to demonstrate exceptional cognitive prowess via standardized cognitive assessments, meticulously evaluated by the administrative team well in advance. This evaluative process carries financial implications for parents engaging external admission assessments. Nevertheless, our institution offers a "No Fee" in-house assessment, eliminating financial barriers and extending research-based gifted programming opportunities to all gifted students in the capital region. Our vision is to position New Horizons Charter School as the inaugural formalized high school gifted program within our vicinity.

The administration conscientiously fulfills its responsibilities for growth, staff supervision, and evaluation, fostering leadership capacities and channelling learning initiatives toward research-driven gifted education. Encouraging survey results from our staff substantiate the efficacy of our recruitment and retention strategies.

Moreover, our administration collaborates extensively with an actively engaged School Council and a fundraising association. The favorable outcomes from satisfaction surveys among parents corroborate the high level of satisfaction with their engagement in our school community.

- **Fiscally Viable:** The school is fiscally viable and responsible.

Transparent financial practices and a focus on cost-effectiveness and resource allocation allow us to prioritize a stable and well-managed educational environment, ensuring sustainability and continuous annual growth over decades.

Since its inception, our average annual growth rate has been 11% per year, and we have increased it by 252% overall. We consecutively increased by one class per grade over the last ten years, exceeding our facility's enrolment cap.

In 2015, we moved into our new location with a renovation budget from the government that allowed us to update the school. The school facility comprises a permanent structure leased from Elk Island Catholic Schools (former St. Theresa's School).

Since 2015, ten modular units were obtained by the Board from Alberta Infrastructure for instructional spaces to assist with the fast growth of our Charter. However, our total classroom utilization rate is still 111%. Our challenge is to provide proper instruction space for our students within this restricted area. With the shared gymnasium, our utilization rate is even higher, increasing our rate beyond 111%.

Our school site is shared with Ecole Claudette-et-Denis-Tardiff (ECDT) school, whose modulares are physically on our land site but detached from the physical plant. We share our gymnasium and playground space with Ecole Claudette-Et-Denis-Tardif (ECDT) and janitorial, school maintenance, electricity, heating, water and sewer, and property repairs.

We have two Partnerships with our neighboring school districts. Elk Island Public Schools for transportation and Elk Island Catholic School for our physical plant. New Horizons Charter School has also collaborated with the County of Strathcona, ECDT, Friends of New Horizons Charter School, and the provincial government to purchase and install a new playground for both schools and the community.

The limitations of our facility have impeded growth. Consequently, this limits the school of choice for families who require specialized programs that New Horizons offers for gifted and talented students, and we intend to expand to include a high school. We want to provide our gifted families in the greater Edmonton area and Strathcona County with the first gifted high school.

Our reserves have stayed consistent and reasonable apart from this last school year when we were required to spend some of our reserves on our aging school infrastructure. Our funding comprises 96% from the Government of Alberta, with the remainder derived from various sources such as investment income and net school-generated funds.

For many years, New Horizons submitted a deficit budget due to our need to retain our educational assistant support and counsellors for our students. In the 2021-2022 school year, the government increased the Specialized Learning Support grant, which allowed us to submit a balanced budget, ensuring our students would not have to go without these essential supports to assist with their neurodiversity and social-emotional needs.

- **Successful:** The students, parents, staff, school council, and community members consider the school program successful.

The school recognizes staff, parents, and community members' crucial role in gifted students' academic and emotional development. Success at New Horizons is valuing opportunities,

personal responsibility, parent responsibility, excellence, and respecting the diversity and dignity of every student. Beyond the curriculum, student success is also built into understanding the benefits of citizenship and their personal and community responsibilities. Literacy and Numeracy strategies are reinforced, enriched, and supplemented through differentiated instruction and assessment.

Collaborative synergies between the school council, parent fundraising society, and the wider community continue to flourish. A notable example of such collaboration is epitomized in our community playground project, a collaborative endeavour involving the County of Strathcona, the Government of Alberta, and the francophone school board.

Students benefit from a diverse array of cross-grade option choices, tailored to cater to their individual interests. Some of these options carry either minimal or no fees, with provisions in place for fee waivers when necessary. Detailed fee-related information concerning elective programming and extracurricular activities is accessible during the registration process. The sustained trajectory of enrollment growth and projections stands as a testament to the community's trust and confidence in our charter.

Staff retention and recruitment pose a distinctive challenge, particularly in sourcing individuals equipped or trainable to address the needs of gifted learners. Nevertheless, once recruited, our school is recognized for its commendable level of staff retention.

- **Student success:** is determined under Ministerial Order (#028/2020).

As interpreted from the Ministerial Order (#028/2020). The vision is to recognize giftedness, neuro-diversity, and social-emotional needs, which will be nurtured to support children from all backgrounds in achieving their personal best. Through the shared vision of staff and parents, students receive an appropriate and engaging education according to their abilities and potential. They will gain the knowledge and skills to form the foundations for successful and fulfilling lives and make meaningful contributions to their communities and the world.

Academically gifted students generally have the foundations for academic success and are self-directed and self-disciplined learners. An early year's focus on literacy and numeracy remains the priority, and evidence of proficiency is identified at the start of their educational journey. However, diverse thinkers often face social and emotional barriers that can interfere with individual learning goals, and individual program plans are critical to maintaining foundations for learning.

At New Horizons School, our charter goals consistently provide students with a robust grounding in the Alberta Program of Studies complemented by tailored programming identified in their individualized education plans. Students benefit from an expanded array of options classes and

extracurricular pursuits, empowering them to explore and cultivate their unique interests. While nurturing positive interdependent skills among students, we must further refine strategies for understanding conflict resolution and fostering civil discourse. This proactive character development initiative remains an ongoing focal point in our forthcoming stakeholder forums. Our intent is to support and develop students to feel empowered to embrace both social and academic challenges with confidence.

- **Sharing Practices:** The charter school shares innovative practices and learning outcomes with the education community.

The entire school staff and central office personnel attend The Association of Alberta Public Charter Schools' (TAAPCS) bi-annual Conference, where provincial charter schools network, share ideas, and engage in professional growth opportunities. There are also opportunities to discuss pathways to success within each charter. The Superintendent and the Secretary-Treasurer also participate in the College of the Association of School Superintendents (CASS) and Alberta School Business Officials of Alberta (ASBOA).

Communication among the charter board, superintendent, and staff is effective and in the school's best interests. Student and school information is shared with stakeholders in various methods, including school websites, social media, newsletters, communication apps, IPPs, report cards, emails, stakeholder forums, meet the teacher, PGP, Google Classroom, parent information groups, and student focus groups. The school is preparing to transition to a new student information system to improve parent communication through the parent portal.

- **Student achievement** at the charter school is consistently strong or improving.

New Horizons Charter School provides a welcoming, caring, and respectful learning environment. Our students must be engaged intellectually, feel safe, and prepare them for lifelong learning.

The Provincial Achievement Test results are consistently higher in both Standard of Acceptance and Standard of Excellence from the provincial average. Students also participate in school-based, provincial, and norm-referenced assessments, including CAT4 assessments.

On average, over a five-year study, excluding two years of unavailable information due to the pandemic, the academic performance indicator on our provincial achievement exams' acceptable standard shows a marked increase above the province by 20 – 30%. On average, over a five-year study, excluding two years of unavailable information due to the pandemic, the academic performance indicator on our provincial achievement exams' standard of excellence shows a marked increase above the province by 30 – 40%.

One of the measures for academic placement that results in enhanced programming or accelerated programming is through the Canadian Achievement Test (CAT4). New Horizons

School assesses students using the CAT4 for Reading and Math across the grades. Our students score, on average, above the 60th percentile in Reading and above the 75th percentile in math when norm-referenced across national percentiles.

- **Continuous Improvement:** The charter school exhibits, in multiple ways, an ongoing commitment to engaging students, teachers, parents, and community members in a model of continuous improvement.

The framework for continuous improvement planning at New Horizons revolves around several key components, commencing with our collective vision. This vision envisions a milieu wherein gifted students, within a positive academic setting, strive for excellence while receiving robust social and emotional support, thereby enabling them to make meaningful contributions to their community and the wider world.

Our journey toward growth and enhancement encounters challenges stemming from our size limitations in meeting the growing demands for gifted programming. Over time, we've endeavoured to confront these challenges by augmenting class offerings across various grades and undergoing multiple relocations and expansions. Despite these efforts, we continue to grapple with meeting the accelerating pace of growth.

Unique learning spaces, such as a maker space, hands-on STEM activities, an outdoor classroom, sensory rooms, and experiential learning opportunities, are designed to optimize engagement and learning and maximize the learning spaces within New Horizons.

- **Community Engagement:** The charter school works collaboratively with stakeholders and demonstrates broad and sustained levels of community engagement.

Community engagement continues to be a focus for New Horizons School. Scheduled visits with local parliament members allow students to interact and engage in discussions on various topics, including economics and the environment. The Parent Fundraising Society partners with small businesses to secure funds that support extra-curricular activities. Other methods to connect with the community include the following:

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| Community joint use facility agreements | Citizenship Programs |
| Newsletters | PowerSchool |
| School Council | FANHS |
| County of Strathcona | EICS, EIPS, Francophone school |
| MLA, Ministers (invitational) | Alberta Education/Infrastructure |
| Neighborhood kindness club | Leadership group good Samaritan |
| Plant distribution for active Citizenship | Stakeholder Forums |
| Christmas Bureau Program | Parent Volunteers |

One challenge in engaging the community has been sustaining meaningful relationships due to our frequent relocations to neighbouring communities. Over the past eight years we took deliberate actions to establish positive relationships within our current neighborhood and the greater Strathcona region. Community engagement in planning future expansion will be integral.

- **Research Informed:** The charter school uses research-informed practices to create innovative learning environments and improve student learning.

The charter indicates that New Horizons School utilizes the following instructional programs, resources, and methods to address the needs of gifted students individually and in a congregated setting.

This is realized through social and emotional instruction for students: executive functioning, resilience, and growth mindset, as well as research-based educational practices, ensuring that instructional methods align with the latest findings in gifted education. The staff actively engages in ongoing professional development, neuro-diverse training, and visual learner methodology in their teaching strategies to meet gifted learners' unique needs effectively. Monitoring and discussions around professional growth plans for each staff are scheduled, and action items supporting adult learning in pedagogical areas such as:

- Curriculum compacting;
- Pre- and post-assessments;
- Individual student projects;
- Course/curriculum acceleration and extension;
- Small group student projects;
- Individualized educational plans that allow students, parents, and teachers opportunities to set goals for each student's learning;
- Extensive use of technology in the classroom while mindful of screen time and
- Group interaction to promote interpersonal skill development.

This year, select staff from New Horizons are partnering with Dr. Farha Shariff, who will work with our school to improve equity and diversity. Dr. Shariff comes from the University of Alberta to improve our understanding of inclusive practices.

Through changes in government policy and curriculum development, our research-based instructional methodology has remained the foundation for our school, giving students the coping skills to move on to further academic endeavors. Students leave confident that their "gift" is not a social-emotional detriment to their academic and social success. We aspire to grow our support services to students to instill confidence and develop their self-advocacy skills. We plan to develop future high school graduates of New Horizons School who will take on academic and leadership roles in society.