

# ***PRAIRIE CREEK COMMUNITY SCHOOL***

*2024 Annual Report on Curriculum, Instruction and Student Achievement &  
World's Best Workforce Report*



**Minnesota Charter School District #4090**

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## **1. School Information**

This report provides the staff and families of Prairie Creek Community School (PCCS), the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE), Northfield Public Schools, and the general public with information describing the progress of PCCS and its students during the 2023 - 2024 school year.

Prairie Creek Community School (PCCS) is a charter public school, founded in 1983, that serves students in kindergarten through fifth grade. PCCS focuses on progressive education for all students. PCCS is a non-profit trust registered with the Minnesota Attorney General's Office.

### **Mission Statement**

#### **Prairie Creek is a community school**

Families, teachers, staff, and students collaborate to create a joyful and challenging climate for learning. We work to build an inclusive environment to which all belong. We embrace the experiences, identities, and perspectives that we all bring.

#### **Prairie Creek is a child-centered school**

Children discover their power in an experiential learning environment. We honor the whole child and attend to the well-being of each individual - socially, emotionally, physically, and academically. We strive to know children deeply and assure them of their value.

#### **Prairie Creek is a progressive education school**

We are committed to inquiry, innovation, and reflective practice. We support children in developing the skills and habits of mind that cultivate a lifelong love of learning. We share our philosophy and practice with others and learn from them.

#### **Prairie Creek works to make the world a better place**

We engage in democratic decision-making and problem-solving where children are empowered to speak their voice and effect change in pursuit of a just and compassionate world. We challenge and prepare one another to understand and actively resist racism and other societal injustices. We nurture a close connection with nature and promote environmental stewardship.

**Authorizer**

Northfield Public Schools  
Matt Hillmann, EdD.  
507-663-0600

**Relationship with Authorizer**

PCCS opened in 2002. The school charter contract was renewed in 2005 (05/06 to 07/08), 2008 (08/09 to 10/11), 2011 (11/12 to 15/16), 2016 (16/17 to 20/21) and 2021 (21/22 to 25/26).

The charter contract identifies the statutory purpose of the school:

- ~ Provide an educational program for its students in order to improve all pupil learning and all student achievement
- ~ Increase quality learning opportunities for all pupils;
- ~ Encourage the use of different and innovative teaching methods;
- ~ Measure learning outcomes and create different and innovative forms of measuring outcomes
- ~ Create new professional opportunities for teachers, including the opportunity to be responsible for the learning program at the school site

Each fall, the executive director sends a formal report to the Northfield School Board regarding the previous school year. The authorizer has been pleased with PCCS and the Board has been supportive of its goals. On January 29, 2024, Superintendent Dr. Hillmann and charter authorizer liaison Daryl Kehler spent a day reviewing the program and meeting with students, staff and parents.

**School Calendar & Hours of Operation**

The first day of school was September 5, 2023 and school ended on June 6, 2024. PCCS was open Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays from 8:15 am to 2:30 pm and Wednesdays from 9:15 am to 2:30 pm.

**Student / Classroom Teacher Ratio**

PCCS employed nine classroom teachers to serve 180 students in grades K-5. There are twenty children in each classroom.

Ratio of students to licensed teachers for FY23 was 14.21 (data from Minnesota Report Card)

## 2. Student Enrollment, Attrition and Dissemination

	19-20	20-21	21-22	22-23	23-24
Enrollment (K-5)	179	180	178	177	179
Average Daily Membership	179	180	178.80	179.06	180

PCCS conducts an enrollment lottery each March for the following school year and enrollment procedures are shared with targeted groups in the following ways:

- Two Open Houses per year
- Tours for prospective families upon request
- Advertising (Northfield Public Library LINK publication, Community Education Brochure, Northfield News)
- Preschool program outreach

### Key Demographic Trends (Data from Minnesota Report Card)

PCCS Students	19-20	20-21	21-22	22-23	23-24
Enrollment (K-5)	179	180	178	177	179
American Indian/ Alaska Native	0%	0 (0.0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (0.6%)
Asian	3 (1.7%)	4 (2.2%)	5 (2.8%)	5 (2.8%)	4 (2.2%)
Black/African American	3 (1.7%)	3 (1.7%)	4 (2.2%)	1 (0.6%)	0 (0.0%)
White	155 (86.6%)	150 (83.3%)	145 (81.5%)	147 (83.15)	156 (87.2%)
Hispanic	7 (3.9%)	8 (4.4%)	10 (5.6%)	13 (7.3%)	9 (5%)
Native American / Pac. Islander	0 (0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Two or More Races	11 (6.1%)	15 (8.3%)	14 (7.9%)	11 (6.2%)	9 (5.0%)
Students of Color	24 (13.4%)	30 (16.7%)	33 (18.5%)	30 (16.9%)	23 (12.8%)
Free and Reduced Lunch	22 (12.3%)	23 (12.8%)	7 (3.9%)	27 (15.3%)	30 (16.85)
English Language Learners	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Special Education Status	42 (23.5%)	36 (20%)	34 (19.1%)	34 (19.2%)	40 (22.3%)

PCCS has consistently low numbers of student attrition each year.

Percentage of students who are continuously enrolled between October 1 of 2023 and October 1 of 2024	99.3%
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### **3. Governance and Management**

#### **Board of Directors**

The membership of the Board is composed of parents and/or guardians of currently enrolled PCCS students, staff members and community members. The School Board consists of nine members. The executive director serves as a non-voting member. Terms of the members run from July 1 to June 30.

There were nine voting members of the PCCS Board for the 2023-2024 school year. Overall, board members had an average attendance rate of 80%.

Agendas, meeting minutes, policies, budgets and audited statements are posted on the website: [www.prairiecreek.org](http://www.prairiecreek.org)

#### **Board Members 2023-2024**

<b>Member Name</b>	<b>Board Position</b>	<b>Affiliation</b>	<b>Term End Date</b>	<b>Email Address</b>
Margit Zsolnay	Member	Parent	6/30/2024	mzsolnay-board@prairiecreek.org
Ryan Kiesel	Treasurer	Teacher	6/30/2026	rkiesel@prairiecreek.org
Christine Williams	Chair	Parent	6/30/2026	cwilliams-board@prairiecreek.org
Tim Goodwin	Vice-Chair	Community Member	6/30/2024	tgoodwin-board@prairiecreek.org
Lyndsey Reece	Member	Parent	6/30/2024	lreece-board@prairiecreek.org
Shelly Dickinson	Member	Community Member	6/30/2025	sdickinson-board@prairiecreek.org
Jess Provancha	Member	Parent	6/30/2025	jprovancha-board@prairiecreek.org
Nancy Dennis	Member	Teacher	6/30/2024	ndennis@prairiecreek.org
Beth Molitor	Secretary	Parent	6/30/2026	bmolitor-board@prairiecreek.org

### Board Training Record

Board Member	Governance	Financial	Employment
Margit Zsolnay	10/12/2021	6/22/2021	6/23/2021
Christine Williams	9/16/2020	11/24/2020	8/26/2020
Beth Molitor	1/13/2021	11/24/2020	1/27/2021
Lyndsey Reece	6/6/2022	9/20/2021	6/6/2022
Ryan Kiesel	10/27/2023	11/12/2023	10/30/23
Jess Provancha	11/21/2023	11/21/2023	11/21/2023
Shelly Dickinson	11/11/2020	11/24/2020	3/24/2021
Nancy Dennis	12/28/2022	6/20/2023	12/29/2022
Tim Goodwin	10/12/2021	9/20/2021	10/26/2021

### Annual Training

Data Practices Training, September 28, 2023

### Director Professional Development Plan

PCCS Executive Director, Simon Tyler, completed his 13th year as executive director in 2023-2024. Principal Licensure: File Folder # 367631

In 2023-2024, he completed the following leadership-related professional development;

- MDE Principal Development and Evaluation workshop
- Urban Leadership Academy: Unearthing Joy: A Guide Toward Culturally and Historically Responsive Teaching and Learning
- Charter Leader Cohort: Unearthing Joy as Learning Leaders

**Board Performance Summary (results from Spring Parent Summary)**

	Strong Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strong Disagree
The board provides a well-understood strategic vision for the school that is consistent with the mission.	68.8%	28.6%	2.6%	0%
The board is successful in ensuring the short-term and long-term financial stability of the school.	70.1%	27.3%	2.6%	0%
The board appropriately supports and provides accountability for the executive director.	72.4%	26.3%	1.3%	0%
I feel informed about the work of the PCCS school board	51.3%	35.9%	12.8%	0%

**4. Staffing**

PCCS employs highly qualified staff throughout its program. In support of the school’s child-centered mission, teachers oversee class sizes capped at 20 students. Additionally, the school commits to providing additional classroom staffing support with four general education teaching assistants. Targeted academic support is provided by a team of special education teachers and paraprofessionals. With the support of an ADSIS grant, PCCS implemented a reading intervention program in FY23. Specialist classes are provided by part-time visual arts, music and Spanish teachers.

**2023-24 Licensed Teaching Staff**

Name	File #	License / Agreement	2023-24 Status	Comments
Simon Tyler	367631	Executive Director	R	
Kelsey Fitschen-Hemmah	450336	Special Education Director	R	
Amy Narveson	385212	K/1	R	
Amanda Solinger	477588	K/1	R	
Amy Brown	398391	K/1	R	
Molly McGovern Wills	427419	2/3	R	
Nancy Dennis	394260	2/3	NR	Retiring



Stacey Sandler	468838	2/3	R	
Michelle Martin	406690	4/5	R	
Amy Haslett-Marroquin	347525	4/5	R	
Ryan Kiesel	1008790	4/5	R	
Liz Nelson	339146	Visual Arts	R	
Olivia Moraczewski	471728	Music and Orchestra	R	
Tricia Christopherson	338643	Spanish	R	
Cale Steinhoff	486408	Special Education	R	
Atia Cole	450336	Special Education	R	
Michelle Bigalke	419188	Special Education	R	
Anna Lisa Rustad	386075	Reading Intervention	R	

\* R = Return, NR = Not Returning

**Licensed teacher percentage turnover rate:**

2023-24 to 2024-25: (non-returning teachers / total teachers x 100) = 6.25%

**Licensed teacher percentage turnover trend data:**

	20-21 to 21-22	21-22 to 22-23	22-23 to 23-24	23-24 to 24-25
<b>Percentage</b>	13%	13.3%	12.5%	6.25%

**2023 - 2024 Non-Licensed Staff**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Assignment</b>	<b>2023-24 Status</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Colleen Braucher	Office Manager	R	
Keith Johnson	Financial Officer	R	
Megan O'Meara	Office Assistant	R	

Diana Drager	Office Assistant / Special Education Admin Assistant	R	
Olivia Rezac	Teaching Assistant / Health Paraprofessional/After School Care Assistant	R	
Samantha Bolton	Special Education Paraprofessional	R	
Mary Poole	Teaching Assistant	R	
Kelley Ekstrom	Special Education Paraprofessional / After School Care Assistant	R	
Audrey Lane-Getaz	Teaching Assistant / Special Education Paraprofessional / After School Care Assistant	R	
Megan Fishman	Teaching Assistant	NR	STU Teacher Residency Program
Hannah Bauer	Special Education Paraprofessional / After School Care Assistant	R	
Jesse Wiener	Special Education Paraprofessional	NR	STU Teacher Residency Program
Russel Boyington	After School Care Program Lead	R	
Connie Menssen	School Nurse	NR	
Maggie Kiley	Librarian	NR	Retiring

## **5. Finances**

As a charter school we are responsible for the education of children and for having a clear knowledge of business and fiscal responsibilities. Colleen Braucher is the Office Manager/Human Resources Coordinator and Keith Johnson is the Financial Officer. The PCCS Board and Finance Committee meet on the 4th Thursday of each month and the school's financial information is carefully reviewed and discussed at each meeting.

PCCS has steadily built a strong fund balance reserve, finishing FY24 with a fund balance of \$935,610 (35.1% of annual expenditures) which has kept the school fiscally sound and well positioned to weather unforeseen events. The audited Financial Statements for the year ending June 30, 2024 show General Fund total revenue at \$2,656,597 and General Fund total expenses in the amount of \$2,691,337 resulting in a Net Loss of \$34,740.

Abdo, an independent auditor, has conducted PCCS’s financial analysis. PCCS will provide audited financial statements to Northfield Public Schools and the Minnesota Department of Education on or before December 31, 2024.

## **6. Academic Performance**

### **World’s Best Workforce Plan / Authorizer Contract Goals**

<b>All Children are Ready for School</b>	
At least 70% of kindergarten students will be ready for first grade by reaching Fountas & Pinnell level D	Fall: n/a Winter: n/a Spring (D):53.3% <i>Goal not met</i>
At least 75% of grade 1 students will be ready for second grade by reaching Fountas & Pinnell level J	Fall (D): 43.3% Winter (F): 46.7% Spring (J): 40.0% <i>Goal not met</i>
At least 75% of second grade students will be ready for third grade by reaching Fountas & Pinnell level M	Fall (I): 37.9% Winter (K): 56.7% Spring (M): 63.3% <i>Goal not met</i>
<b>All Students are Ready for Career and College</b>	
<b>MCA - Math (Grades 3 - 5)</b> PCCS combined FY22 - FY26 proficiency rate exceeds the state combined FY22 - FY26 proficiency rate.  PCCS combined FY22 - FY26 proficiency rate exceeds the resident district combined FY22-26 proficiency rate.	PCCS: 62.9% State: 45.5% Goal met PCCS: 62.9% NPS: 60.4% <i>Goal met</i>
<b>MCA - Reading (Grades 3 - 5)</b> PCCS combined FY22 - FY26 proficiency rate exceeds the state combined FY22 - FY26 proficiency rate.	PCCS:65.9% State: 49.9% Goal met

PCCS combined FY22 - FY26 proficiency rate exceeds the resident district combined FY22 - FY26 proficiency rate.	PCCS: 65.9% NPS: 61.2% <i>Goal met</i>
<b>Close the Achievement Gap(s) Between Student Groups</b>	
<b>MCA Math - FRP (Grades 3 - 5)</b> PCCS combined FY22 - FY26 proficiency rate exceeds the state combined FY22 - FY26 proficiency rate  PCCS combined FY22 - FY26 proficiency rate exceeds the resident district combined FY22 - FY26 proficiency rate	PCCS: 40.0% State: 27.0% <i>Goal met</i> PCCS: 40.0% NPS: 38.2% <i>Goal met</i>
<b>MCA Reading - FRP (Grades 3 - 5)</b> PCCS combined FY22 - FY26 proficiency rate exceeds the state combined FY22 - FY26 proficiency rate  PCCS combined FY22 - FY26 proficiency rate exceeds the resident district combined FY22 - FY26 proficiency rate	PCCS: 53.3% State: 33.4% <i>Goal met</i> PCCS: 53.3% NPS: 41.8% <i>Goal met</i>

**WBWF Narrative:**

**Provide student access to effective teachers who reflect the diversity of enrolled students.** PCCS is committed to equitable access to high quality teachers for all children. This begins with placement consideration for incoming kindergarteners. We are a small public charter school that typically enrolls 30 kindergarteners each year with students admitted by lottery. Admitted students and families attend an orientation session in the spring. This is an opportunity for the experienced team of K/1 teachers to assess student needs. Placement is also informed by a review of surveys completed by parents and pre-schools.

Students of color, low income families and students with disabilities all have access to experienced and effective/exemplary rated teachers. An experienced special education teacher team closely collaborates in the intake process, ensuring equitable access for students with disabilities. The administrator and the rest of the faculty participate in the placement process later in the spring and review guidance and data input of this K/1 team.

New faculty members are mentored and coached in alignment with the school's commitment to educating for equity and progressive education practices. PCCS has developed a robust coaching model informed by training in the Art of Transformation Coaching and Coaching for Equity through the Bright Morning organization. This training informs the annual peer coaching model implemented with the support of Q Comp funds.

12.8% of PCCS students in 2023-2024 were students of color. Groups that are not represented by licensed staff are: American Indian/ Alaska Native, Black/African American and Hispanic. Openings for teacher positions are infrequent, PCCS is committed to developing outreach to more diverse teacher applicants in all staffing positions. To support this commitment, PCCS supports resident teachers in collaboration with the St. Thomas Charter School Resident Teacher initiative. The school also forges connections with a broader network of potential hires beyond Minnesota. For example, PCCS builds strong connections at workshops and conferences with local and national organizations. These partners, such as the Progressive Education Network have strong equity missions. This positions our school to be more prepared to systematically reach out to a more diverse population of potential educators.

### **Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (MCAs)**

<b>Scores in %</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>2024</b>
<b>PCCS Math</b>	51.9	56.2	60.7	62.9
<b>State Math</b>	44.2	44.8	46.0	45.5
<b>PCCS Reading</b>	72.0	73.0	73.0	65.9
<b>State Reading</b>	52.5	51.1	49.9	49.9
<b>PCCS Science</b>	65.5	60.0	69.0	50.0
<b>State Science</b>	47.9	50.0	48.4	45.0

## **7. Innovative Practices & Implementation**

PCCS’s progressive philosophy aligns closely with current research and best practices for developing 21st century skills. The school is a multi-age, active learning environment that fosters creativity, critical thinking, and a passion for learning. The school places a strong emphasis on the value of outdoor learning, play, the arts and the development of social and emotional intelligence. PCCS is committed to strategic action work centered on educating for equity. This work is reflected in the strategic action goals.

The academic program is centered on a philosophy, rooted in the teachings of John Dewey and other progressive educators, that holds that children will construct an understanding of the world from genuine experiences. Consequently, children engage in thematic study and individual projects throughout the school year. Teachers tailor this study to the children’s developmental stages as they progress through the K - 5 program. Interdisciplinary study is aligned to standards

through an annual review by teacher professional development committees. Comprehensive literacy and math plans support this work and ensure continuity and opportunity for reading, writing and numeracy to also connect in authentic ways with other subject areas. PCCS has a strong commitment to the arts. Specialists teach all children in the fields of visual art, music and Spanish. A team of teaching assistants provides an additional level of child-centered support.

The general education program is supported by a special education team. The special education director oversees a team of licensed special education teachers, paraprofessionals and contracted services in support of Individual Education Program (IEP) needs. A literacy intervention teacher provides tiered ADSIS support in literacy.

PCCS is committed to a robust and authentic model of teacher evaluation. All teachers participate in a peer coaching program funded by Q Comp. Teachers are evaluated by the school executive director in accordance with the school's teacher evaluation plan.

### **Student Evaluation**

PCCS is structured around a small, multi-age classroom model to provide a child-centered learning environment. Academic and non-academic goals are established for each child at a fall parent/student/teacher conference. Beyond state accountability measures that are detailed in this report, progress is monitored through formative assessments in math and literacy and a variety of measures including projects and performance in thematic study areas.

The school meets its commitment to innovative approaches to measuring outcomes with teacher written narrative reports. These are shared with families during the winter and spring conferences providing deep whole-child insights into student progress.

### **Innovative Professional Development Model**

Student learning is designed by teachers in an innovative community of professional collaboration. Teachers team in professional development committees that review standards and best practices across the curricular areas. These committees meet and plan the weekly two hour professional development sessions for faculty. In addition, the teaching staff participates in a professional development retreat at the end of the year. This is a time for faculty reflection on the year's work and future planning focused on the mission and purpose of the school. The staff also participates in four days of workshops prior to the start of the school year. The faculty functions as an authentic learning community with teacher leadership employed to develop workshops related to academic and non-academic goals. Faculty are encouraged and supported to attend out of school professional development that aligns with their growth goals and support the school mission.

PCCS attended to several key elements of the Strategic Plan in the 2023-2024 school year. Including:

## **The Arts**

In January of 2024 PCCS partnered with St. Olaf college in a month-long arts' residency. PCCS students and faculty worked alongside St. Olaf faculty and students to create an original Opera. Entitled *If The Rock Could Talk*, the opera was performed for the whole school community at the Northfield Middle School.

## **All School Book Club**

In 2023 PCCS was awarded the Minnesota Association of Charter Schools (MACS) Innovation Award for its All School Book Club (ASBC). The ASBC is a teacher-led initiative that focuses mission-centered community activities around a chosen text that the whole school engages with. Teacher-led professional development is aligned to the chosen text forging a connection between pedagogy and practice. As part of the award, a video was created highlighting the program. This video is now shared on the school's website and will be showcased by teachers at education conferences.

## **St. Thomas Charter School Residency Program**

In the 2023 - 2024 school year PCCS deepened its relationship with St. Thomas University and the Charter School Residency Program. Three PCCS faculty have now graduated from this "grow your own" model. In 2024-2025, PCCS will host two more residents who are on the general education and special education paths.

## **8. Future Plans**

The 2022-2026 strategic plan aligns with the current authorizer contractual cycle. The plan was developed with a commitment to aligning to the school's mission and purpose. Key focus areas were identified for each mission pillar. Additionally, a fifth strategic dimension was added, school sustainability.

Advisory committees, faculty and board systematically review action item progress bringing a flexible, collaborative and problem-solving lens to our strategic actions.

In 2024-2025 strategic activities include:

### **READ Act Implementation**

A cohort of PCCS and Arcadia charter school faculty will engage with READ Act training through the University of Minnesota. In the spring of 2025, PCCS faculty will review the list of MDE approved reading curriculum.

### **Teacher-Powered Professional Development**

The three teacher-led professional development committees will focus on Math, All School Book Club and Thematic learning. Faculty will also engage in a book study of Gholdy Muhammad's *Unearthing Joy*.

**Sustainability**

The board will build off prior year conversations around fiscal sustainability. The school is committed to maintaining a strong fund balance and responsible long-term planning. Discussions and budget planning will factor in a response to the anticipated continuing shortfalls in adequate funding to ensure mission-centered program sustainability and security.