

# A different type of success: teaching important life skills through project based learning

**Scott Wurdinger and Jennifer Rudolph**  
*Minnesota State University, Mankato, USA*

---

## **Abstract**

US high schools appear to measure success according to the number of students admitted into four-year institutions each year. Although this is one measure, there are some schools that focus on developing important life skills needed to become productive members of society. Online surveys were sent out to alumni, students, teachers, and parents to a student-centered charter school in Minnesota to explore definitions of success and determine if this school teaches life skills. One hundred and forty-seven surveys were collected from these four groups. Life skills such as creativity (94%) and ability to find information (92%) were ranked much higher than academic skills such as test taking (33%) and note taking (39%). Academic skills ranked low, yet 50 percent of the alumni polled graduated from college, which is considerably higher than the national average (39%). To further enhance the learning at project based learning schools, educators should provide opportunities for students to practice academic skills such as note taking and test taking so that students who plan to attend college will be better prepared. The research in this study showed that this school is excellent at teaching important life skills that help students succeed in college, and in life in general.

**Keywords** charter schools, EdVisions, school reform, small schools

Mainstream US public high schools often measure success based on acceptance rates into post-secondary education institutions each year, while the less successful students are encouraged to pursue jobs after graduation (Bushaw, 2007). This measurement of success relies heavily on students' abilities to do well on college entrance tests, which typically require fairly high scores for admittance into undergraduate programs. Although college admittance is one way to measure high school success, other schools using innovative approaches to learning are reexamining what it means to be successful after graduating from high school. It is our assumption that schooling should be about more than academic skill development, and should focus on teaching important life skills such as creativity and problem solving that will help students become successful community members after they graduate from high school.

This research study focuses on one school that has a broad view of success. Minnesota New Country School (MNCS), located in Henderson, Minnesota (50 miles southwest of Minneapolis), uses project-based learning (PBL) as its primary teaching method. MNCS

has a national reputation in the United States for designing their entire curriculum on PBL and was chosen for this study because of their emphasis on self-directed learning. MNCS's view of success is broader than its traditional counterpart, and attempts to teach students important life skills that are needed to be productive members of society, regardless of whether they attend college or not.

In 1994 EdVisions Cooperative was created alongside MNCS for the purpose of 'creating a professional association of teacher/owners that contract with a school board to supply a learning program. It is based upon true site-based management and dynamic and flexible decision-making' (EdVisions, 2008). MNCS gained national attention in 2001 when the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation awarded a grant to the original creators of MNCS to replicate the school. It was at this point that EdVisions, Inc., a non-profit organization was formed to oversee the replication process. Since 2001 EdVisions, Inc. has created over 45 schools across the US modeled after its flagship school.

MNCS consists of grades 6–12 (11–18-year-olds), with a total of 109 students and eight advisors and eight teaching assistants (Study of the Minnesota New Country School, n.d.). Students who attend this school are from southern Minnesota usually within a 40-mile radius. They come from wide-ranging socio-economic backgrounds. Dee Thomas, lead teacher at the school who is responsible for collecting student data on family income, mentioned that the number of students at or below poverty as defined by the state department of education has ranged from 21 to 35 percent over the past 15 years. She also mentioned that the school is situated in a 'proud farming community' where parents would be embarrassed to fill out income levels and so she believes the numbers are probably closer to 50–60 percent (D. G. Thomas, personal communication, 12 December 2008).

The school consists of a large open room with several pods of computer workstations. Each pod has 15–18 computer workstations, similar to what one would observe in a work environment, and each pod has one advisor. Students do much of their work at their computers, however there are several other rooms connected to the large open room where students can do specialized work such as design and build construction projects, record music, and grow plants to name a few. There is also a stage used for theater performances and project presentations.

The project process consists of filling out a project proposal form, negotiating the details of the project with an advisory committee, doing the project, and presenting the project to the advisory committee. Much of the time students work alone on their own projects, primarily because of their own specific interests, however students are allowed to collaborate when they have similar interests in a project. Projects are broad ranging and have included designing museums, developing software programs, designing claymation characters, creating videos, and creating documentaries through pictures (Newell, 2003). Depending upon their complexity, these projects may take a few days or several months to complete. When students finish a project they demonstrate their level of understanding by doing a presentation for their advisory group consisting of peers, advisors, community members, and parents. After the presentation, advisors and students discuss what curriculum state standards have been met through the project, and how many credits they will receive for their work.

Students must complete all of the state standards so they are provided a copy of the standards and asked to be mindful of how they will complete all the standards through their projects. Students move through this process at their own pace and finish their high school education when they have met all the mandatory state standards. Advisors work

closely with students to make sure that all standards have been addressed through their project work. Some students graduate earlier than their traditional counterparts and others graduate later.

MNCS's approach to learning is quite different than the lecture format used by many schoolteachers, because with PBL, students take control of their own learning by choosing projects that are relevant and meaningful to their own lives. The theoretical underpinnings of the project method rely heavily on Dewey's (1938) 'pattern of inquiry'. The pattern of inquiry consists of six steps, however Dewey's explains that his theory is similar to the scientific method and highlights four basic steps (pp. 101–19). He explains that a relevant problem (step one) causes perplexity and desire to find an answer, which is then followed by creating a plan (step two), testing the plan against reality (step three), and reflecting on its worth (step four). The planning and testing phases of this learning process are critical to project based learning. Designing and building projects require students to solve problems and test out their ideas to determine solutions. Responding to instructor questions and reciting back information, which is a common teaching method in traditional education, allow students to talk, but learning becomes inspirational and exciting when students create plans to build projects and test them against reality. Creating a website, building a learning portfolio, performing an experiment, creating a piece of artwork, or building something off a blueprint, all require students to plan and test ideas in order to determine their worth. For Dewey learning meant doing something with the subject matter aside from reciting and memorizing information. Like Dewey, MNCS's philosophy is based on students' interests and allows them to choose relevant meaningful projects that they create, design, and build (Thomas et al., 2005). Students at this school are given the freedom to determine their own projects and work at their own pace, and the advisors act as guides or facilitators of the learning process.

Since this approach is highly student-centered and allows students freedom to work at their own pace, it provides opportunities to practice life skills such as time management, problem solving, and responsibility. This approach to learning has the potential to teach not only academic content, but also skills that are critical in helping young adults to become productive members of society.

Much of the research conducted on PBL shows an increase in student motivation, student engagement, and academic achievement. Cornell and Clarke (1999) conducted an extensive study on standards based teaching and learning, primarily because they wanted teachers to move away from lecturing to a student-centered format where students were engaged with hands-on projects. They found that students were more engaged when involved in project based learning because it gave them an opportunity to work with other students while doing hands-on activities, which provided them with a more self-directed learning environment. This process had benefits for lower performing students because it gave them an opportunity to discover skills necessary to complete projects, and allowed them to progress at their own pace.

However, two of the paradoxes they discovered, 'less teacher talk requires more teacher time' and 'free-ranging self-directed inquiry depends on a tight design structure', indicate that even though motivation and student learning were enhanced through the project based learning process, it requires more work for teachers when designing projects and preparing lessons (p. 94). Teachers commented that the initial phase of the project based learning process required a fair amount of planning time; however once established, they were able to focus more on guiding students through the process.

Liu and Hsiao (2002) conducted a research study on using project-based learning with middle school students and found that it increased their 'learning of design knowledge, their cognitive strategy use, and their motivation toward learning' (p. 311). In this study students assumed the roles of researcher, graphic artist, programmer, project manager, and audio/visual specialist and worked together to complete multimedia presentations. Because students were directly involved in the process they were able to understand and retain the information they were using while creating and designing their multimedia presentation. Their research clearly indicates that project based learning has the potential to enhance both student motivation and performance in the classroom. These two authors sum up their research by claiming that students showed 'substantial gains in their abilities to understand, use, and present geometric concepts' (p. 303).

Wurdinger et al. (2007) conducted a year-long study that looked at teacher acceptance and student engagement, and discovered that providing a one-day staff training to educate teachers on how to use project based learning enhances and promotes teacher acceptance, which is critical to implementing and sustaining the use of this method in school settings. 'Educational change depends on what teachers do and think – it's as simple and as complex as that' (Fullan, 2001: 115). Without teacher acceptance innovative methods like project-based learning won't make it through the door of the classroom. Middle school teachers interviewed about student engagement in this study were enthusiastic about using this method and stated that it 'promotes discussion and peer teaching, enhances student ownership, increases higher order thinking and life skills, and promotes group cohesiveness' (p. 157). Some teachers used individual projects and others used group projects, but in either situation teachers supported the use of this method because they observed a high level of motivation when students were engaged with their projects. Some teachers stated that students were so engrossed with their projects that they did not notice the teacher was in the room.

Our research study is different than previous studies and focused on the question: does Minnesota New Country School provide students with necessary skills and knowledge to be successful after graduation? The researchers chose this question to determine if the school teaches important life skills and secondly, to determine if this educational approach lends itself to a broader definition of success aside from being accepted into post-secondary institutions. In addition the researchers wanted to explore how alumni, students, staff, and parents define success, assuming that they would have a broader definition due to school's emphasis on project-based learning. We know that many students do well enough at MNCS to get accepted into college, but because of this unusual approach to learning we wanted to take a closer look at whether students were learning valuable life skills.

## **Methods**

One survey was created specifically for MNCS alumni and was presented to 15 alumni during a meeting held at the school in the spring of 2007. The feedback received from these individuals was used to revise the alumni survey and to create three additional surveys for students, staff, and parents. The alumni, student, and parent surveys included several introductory questions specific to each group; however, the majority of questions were given to all four groups with slight variations depending on the group. For instance, an alumni question 'In what ways did your charter school experience prepare you for life after graduation', was revised for the staff survey as follows, 'In what ways does this charter school prepare your students for life after graduation?' In addition, some of the questions on the survey were designed to answer specific questions for MNCS staff and

**Table 1:** Skill types

Basic skills	College/continuing preparation	Thinking skills	Personal qualities
reading	study skills	creativity	responsibility
writing	note taking skills	problem solving	self-esteem
math	test taking skills	decision-making	social skills
verbal		time management	being a team player
listening		finding information	self-directed
		learning how to learn	leadership

are not discussed because they do not help answer our research questions. There was no control group used in this study primarily because the surveys were designed specifically for schools using project based learning. This survey would be difficult to administer to a large traditional mainstream US high school.

These four surveys were designed as online surveys using Zoomerang, and web links were sent to these groups of individuals to complete the surveys. MNCS created email lists for these four groups and a letter explaining the survey, along with survey links, were sent to these email lists. The alumni list consisted of students that attended the school over the past 10 years. Some of these past students attended college and others did not. The surveys were posted online for 14 weeks in order to provide ample time for participants to fill them out and submit them.

Several introductory questions were included on the alumni, student, and parent surveys. The questions on the alumni survey were about post-secondary education and employment; whereas the questions on the parent and student surveys focused on choice, and academic performance before and while attending MNCS.

Our surveys asked participants to rank their competency levels on different types of skills using a 1–5 Likert scale based on the following ratings: 1 = Poor, 2 = Fair, 3 = Satisfactory, 4 = Good and 5 = Excellent. Skills were categorized under four headings, which included Basic Skills, Thinking Skills, Personal Qualities, and College/Continuing Education Preparation. The researchers define the skills listed under Basic Skills and College/Continuing Education Preparation as traditional academic skills, and the skills under Thinking Skills and Personal Qualities as life skills (see Table 1).

The skills identified under Thinking Skills and Personal Qualities were originally identified by the Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills report as important life skills needed to be productive members of a work community (2001: 72).

The survey also included several yes/no questions. These questions asked survey participants if they felt the charter school experience had given them advantages over their peers in different settings. On the alumni survey individuals were asked if the MNCS experience provided them with advantages over their college classmates, and co-workers; whereas on the student survey, they were asked if the MNCS experience provided them with advantages over their peers who were attending more traditional public schools.

Finally, the survey asked open-ended questions. One question asked participants to identify the three most important things they learned at MNCS, and another asked participants to define success. An example of the alumni survey can found in Appendix 1.

**Table 2:** Skill Levels: Percentages of Combined Good and Excellent Responses

	Alumni	Students	Staff	Parents	Averages
<b>BASIC SKILLS</b>					
Reading	76	70	94	72	78
Writing	54	53	63	74	61
Math	29	69	75	59	58
Verbal	96	69	100	87	88
Listening	87	72	81	69	77
<b>THINKING SKILLS</b>					
Creativity	100	91	93	92	94
Problem solving	95	84	87	88	89
Decision making	91	80	87	79	84
Time management	87	66	87	69	77
Finding information	100	84	94	89	92
Learned how to learn	91	82	100	82	89
<b>PERSONAL QUALITIES</b>					
Responsibility	92	85	81	79	84
Self-esteem	84	70	88	82	81
Social skills	79	72	97	74	81
Team player	63	69	62	59	63
Self-directed	92	76	91	75	84
Leadership	84	74	81	71	78
<b>COLLEGE/CONTINUING EDUCATION PREPARATION</b>					
Study skills	63	68	75	56	66
Note taking skills	41	47	25	41	39
Test taking skills	21	50	19	43	33

There were a total of 24 alumni surveys, 68 student surveys, 39 parent surveys, and 16 staff surveys collected. The surveys were collected through the Zoomerang program and analyzed by the two researchers.

## Results

The first question on the alumni survey asked students about their post-secondary accomplishments. Seventeen percent said they completed a trade or technical certification, 50 percent completed an undergraduate degree, eight percent completed a master's degree, and four percent are currently enrolled in a post-master's degree program. Another introductory question asked participants to rank academic performance before attending and while attending MNCS. Eight percent of the alumni said their academic performance increased after moving from a mainstream public school to MNCS. For current students there was a seven percent increase in academic performance when moving from a mainstream public school to MNCS. Parents reported an eight percent increase in their child's academic performance after transitioning to MNCS. The staff survey did not include questions about the students past or current academic performance.

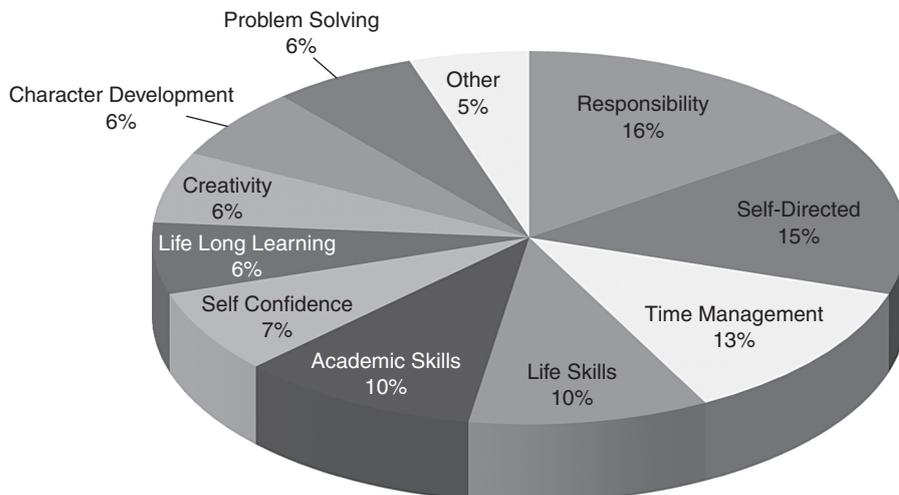
The next set of questions in the survey focused on specific skills students learn while attending MNCS. Table 2 shows the skills in the first column and the surveyed groups across the top. The numbers represent the percentage of survey participants that ranked

skill levels as either good or excellent. For example, in the alumni survey 38 percent ranked their reading skills as good, and 38 percent ranked them as excellent. These two numbers equal 76 percent, which is the first number found in the alumni column for reading. The last column consists of averages from all four groups.

The next section of the survey consisted of several yes/no questions. These questions varied slightly depending on the group. Ninety-two percent of the alumni answered yes when asked if the charter school experience gave them an advantage over their college classmates. Eighty-three percent answered yes when asked if the charter school experience gave them advantages over their co-workers, and 92 percent answered yes when asked if the charter school experience prepared them to reach their goals after graduation. In the student survey, 75 percent said that their charter school experience gives them advantages over their peers in more traditional public schools, and 85 percent said the charter school experience is preparing them to achieve their goals after graduation.

In the staff survey, 100 percent said the charter school experience gave students an advantage over their peers in more traditional public schools, and 100 percent said that the charter school experience prepared students to reach their goals after graduation. In the parent survey, 100 percent said the charter school experience gave their child an advantage over peers in more traditional public schools, and 85 percent said the charter school experience prepared their child to reach his/her goals after graduation.

All four groups of survey participants were asked, ‘what were the three most important things learned at MNCS’. There were a total of 371 out of a possible 429 responses to this question. Of these responses 16 percent said responsibility, 15 percent said self-directed learning, 13 percent said time management, 10 percent said life skills, 10 percent said academic skills, seven percent said self confidence, six percent said lifelong learning, six percent said creativity, six percent said character development, six percent said problem solving, and five percent were other (see Figure 1). In total, 85 percent of the responses identified life skills as most important things learned, whereas only 10 percent identified academic skills such as reading, writing, math, art, or science as one of the three most important things learned.

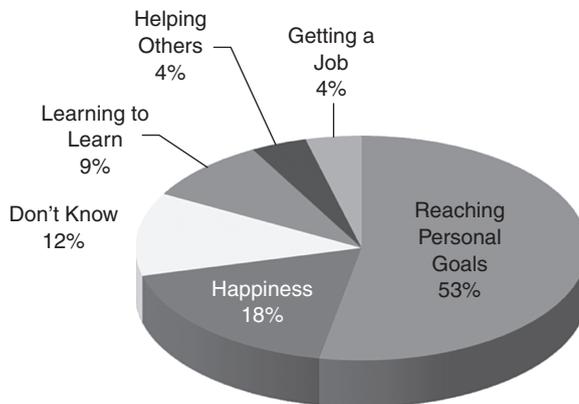


**Figure 1:** Most important learnings

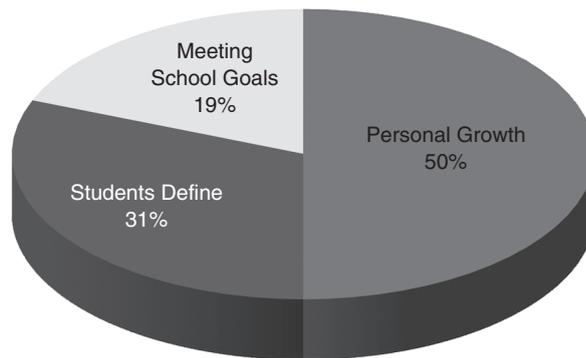
Survey participants were also asked how they define success. Figures 2, 3, 4, and 5 show percentages on how the groups defined success. To code these definitions the researchers identified key words such as happiness, job, goal, learning, helping, and don't know to categorize these definitions and compared our results with each other. For the alumni survey, 37 percent defined success as happiness, 25 percent said reaching their personal goals, 21 percent said having a good job, eight percent said learning how to learn, four percent said the betterment of others, and four percent said other. For students, 53 percent defined success as reaching their personal goals, 18 percent said happiness, 12 percent did not know, nine percent said being a lifelong learner, four percent said finding a good job, and four percent said the betterment of others. For the staff, 50 percent defined success as personal growth, 31 percent said individual students should define success, and 19 percent said meeting learning goals. For parents, 28 percent defined success for their children as meeting school requirements/grades, 28 percent said being a lifelong learner, 26 percent said increased self-esteem, 10 percent said happiness, and eight percent said reaching personal goals.



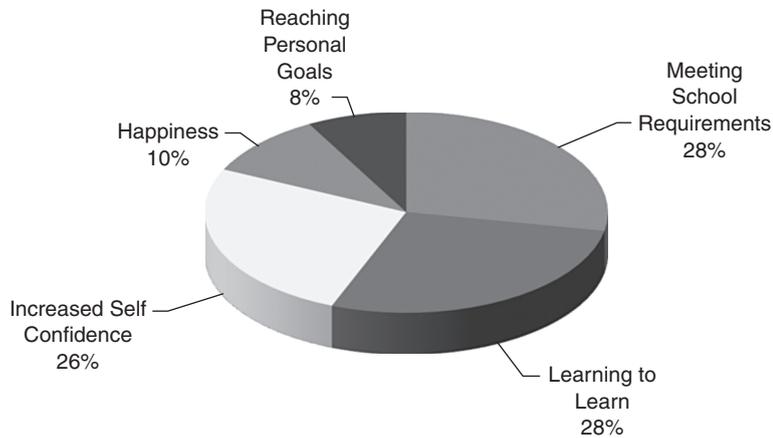
**Figure 2:** Alumni definitions of success



**Figure 3:** Student definitions of success



**Figure 4:** Staff definitions of success



**Figure 5:** Parent definitions of success

## Discussion

One measure of success for US high schools is college acceptance rate, but an even more important measure is college completion, and MNCS bodes well in this area. Fifty percent of the alumni that answered our survey graduated from an undergraduate institution, which is considerably higher than the National average of 39 percent (National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2006). In addition, an overwhelming majority of alumni said that their charter school experience gave them advantages over their college classmates (92%), co-workers (83%), and also allowed them to reach their goals after graduation (92%). The school is evidently perceived to provide students with skills needed to do well in college, and with skills needed to do well in life in general.

Ironically, academic skills, which one would assume are needed to do well in college, scored low by all four survey groups. The four skills with the lowest scores included: test taking (33%), note taking (39%), math (58%), writing (61%). These skills seem fairly important to college success, yet alumni surveyed managed to graduate from a

four-year institution without having much traditional practice with these skills while in high school.

Conversely, the four highest ranked skills by all four groups included creativity (94%), finding information (92%), problem solving (89%) and learning how to learn (89%). All of these skills fall under Thinking Skills or Personal Qualities, which suggests that learning life skills might enhance one's ability to succeed in college more than learning academic skills.

The answers to the open-ended question: what were the three most important things you learned also indicate that students are learning important life skills at MNCS. Responsibility, self-directed learning, and time management were the three most mentioned skills, whereas only 10 percent mentioned an academic skill as one of the most important things they learned. Many schools and educators believe that teaching academic skills such as note taking and test taking are critical to succeeding in college; however, it is evident that MNCS alumni have done quite well in college without having much remedial practice prior to graduating from high school.

This raises an important question: how important are academic skills to high school students? Should skills such as problem solving and self-directed learning play a more central role in high school curriculums? Perhaps life skills are more powerful in providing students with the motivation and drive to, not only do well on tests, but to overcome other challenging obstacles associated with college success. Mainstream US public schools may want to take a lesson from schools like MNCS who use student-centered approaches to learning and focus more on teaching life skills as opposed to traditional test taking skills, especially when considering MNCS's undergraduate completion rates.

Finishing college is one measure of success; however, when alumni were asked to define success very few responses defined it as college acceptance or college completion. Definitions focused most on happiness, reaching personal goals, meeting learning requirements, personal growth, and lifelong learning. These definitions do not necessarily exclude college acceptance or college completion. For instance, happiness or reaching personal goals might include finishing college for some of the survey participants, but only a few participants defined success as solely college completion.

The primary goal of this school is much broader than 'getting into college', and although students do well in this area, there are more important skills being learned that may have a longer lasting impact. Skills such as responsibility, time management and self-directed learning are valuable life skills that should be learned in high school rather than waiting to learn them after entering college or the work force. This school recognizes that all high school graduates may not want to attend college so they attempt to teach students the importance of self-directed learning and the value of lifelong learning. Success is about helping all students achieve their own personal goals and helping them become productive, happy members of society.

Schools like MNCS that promote student-centered approaches to learning may do better than traditional schools at teaching life skills, but to become even more effective these schools should not under-emphasize academic skills. The project based learning approach used by MNCS presents some challenges when teaching academic skills. For example, MNCS does not give students tests, other than the mandated standardized

tests required of all Minnesota high school students so students lack opportunities to practice study skills and test taking skills. Students do projects and are evaluated when they present their projects to their advisory groups, but there are no quizzes or tests on these projects.

Two academic skills that scored low were math and writing. Math skills may be lacking in these types of schools because it is difficult to weave complex math theories into projects. MNCS realizes there is a problem with integrating math standards into projects and so they have begun teaching more traditional math courses to their students.

Perhaps writing scored low because the process of designing and completing projects does not necessarily require much writing. Students fill out project proposal forms and submit other types of written information on forms, but they do not need to turn in written papers on their projects.

To round out the learning in these types of environments educators may want to think about ways to enhance learning academic skills by providing opportunities for students to practice note taking and test taking skills. This could be accomplished by intentionally teaching students how to take tests. Students graduating from these types of US high schools may need these skills to survive in college so the curriculum could include courses or workshops that teach students how to take tests.

Students need freedom that comes with student-centered approaches to learn important life skills, but they may also need structured courses or workshops to learn needed academic skills. The challenge for educators in these environments is to attempt to find a balance so that students learn both skills, which enhances their potential for success after graduation. With careful planning educators can bring the two together to create more successful learning environments.

## **Conclusions**

We found overwhelming evidence that MNCS provides students with necessary skills and knowledge to be successful after graduation. Resonating through the responses is a sense of pride and respect for the project-based learning approach used at this school. This approach allows students to learn important life skills, and instills confidence and desire to become self-directed lifelong learners. Higher education is important to these students, but even more important is an understanding that learning does not stop once an individual completes a higher education degree. At this school learning is highly valued and is promoted as a lifelong process that never ends.

Students have a broad view of success, which for many includes college completion. However, success goes well beyond college completion and includes important values like happiness, reaching personal goals, and the betterment of others. Students have a mature view of reality and understand that success is not necessarily measured by degrees completed, but by being involved in experiences that promote personal growth and happiness. Students leave this school prepared for the challenges of life and are motivated to better themselves and the world around them. Mainstream educators and administrators should explore this approach to learning, as well as the school's underlying philosophy, for possible replication in their own educational settings.

The authors can be contacted via email at: [scott.wurdinger@mnsu.edu](mailto:scott.wurdinger@mnsu.edu)

## References

- Bushaw, W. J. (2007) From the mouths of middle-schoolers: important changes for high school and college. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 89(3), 189–93.
- Cornell, N. & Clarke, J. (1999) The cost of quality: evaluating a standards-based design project. *National Association for Secondary School Principals Bulletin*. Online: [http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_qa3696/is\\_199901/ai\\_n8835892](http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3696/is_199901/ai_n8835892) [accessed December 2006].
- Dewey, J. (1938) *Logic: The theory of inquiry*. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston.
- Edvisions (2008) Online: <http://edvisions.com/> [accessed 17 December 2008].
- Fullan, M. (2001) *The New Meaning of Educational Change*, 3rd edn. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Liu, M. & Hsiao, Y. (2002) Middle school students as multimedia designers: a project-based learning approach. *Journal of Interactive Learning Research*, 13(4), 311–37.
- National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education (2006) *Measuring Up 2006: The National Report Card on Higher Education*, p. 7. Online: [http://www.highereducation.org/reports/mup\\_06/MUP-06.pdf](http://www.highereducation.org/reports/mup_06/MUP-06.pdf) [accessed 12 May 2008].
- Newell, R. (2003) *Passion for Learning: How Project Based Learning Meets the Needs of 21st-century Students*. Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press.
- Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills, US Department of Labor (2001) Learning a living: a blueprint for high performance. A SCANS report for America 2000 executive summary principles and recommendations. In *The Jossey Bass Reader on School Reform*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Study of the Minnesota New Country School: District # 4007. Online: [http://www.newcountryschool.com/media/EDocs/Annual\\_Report\\_0607.pdf](http://www.newcountryschool.com/media/EDocs/Annual_Report_0607.pdf) [accessed 23 April 2008].
- Thomas, D., Enloe, W. & Newell, R. (2005) *The Coolest School in America: How Small Learning Communities are Changing Everything*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Education.
- Wurdinger, S., Haar, J., Hugg, B. & Bezon, J. (2007) A qualitative study using project based learning in a main-stream middle school. *Improving Schools*, 10(2), 150–61.

## Appendix 1: Alumni Survey

Education: Please choose the option that best describes your educational attainment after high school AND your area of study.

Trade or Technical Certification

Completed

Currently enrolled

Began, but did not finish

Area of Study ~ Please Specify:

Undergraduate Education

Completed

Currently enrolled

Began, but did not finish

Area of study ~ please specify:

Master's Level Education

Completed

Currently enrolled

Began, but did not finish

Area of study ~ please specify:

Post-Master's Degree Education

Completed

Currently enrolled  
 Began, but did not finish  
 Area of study ~ please specify:

Current Employment

Unemployed

Current Occupation:

What years did you attend this charter school?

Did you choose to attend this charter school?

Yes, I chose to attend

No, my parents chose for me

Other, please specify

Please rank the following:

1	2	3	4	5
Poor	Fair	Satisfactory	Good	Excellent

My overall academic performance prior to attending this charter school

1 2 3 4 5

My overall academic performance at this charter school

1 2 3 4 5

My overall academic performance after graduating from high school (if applicable)

1 2 3 4 5

Rank the following skills using the 1–5 scale: 1 = Poor; 2 = Fair; 3 = Satisfactory; 4 = Good; 5 = Excellent

In what ways did your charter school experience prepare you for life after graduation?

Basic Skills

Writing Skills

1 2 3 4 5

Math Skills

1 2 3 4 5

Verbal Skills

1 2 3 4 5

Listening Skills

1 2 3 4 5

Thinking Skills

1	2	3	4	5
Poor	Fair	Satisfactory	Good	Excellent

Creativity

1 2 3 4 5

Problem Solving

1 2 3 4 5

Decision Making

1 2 3 4 5

Time Management

1    2    3    4    5

Finding Information

1    2    3    4    5

Learned How to Learn

1    2    3    4    5

Personal Qualities

1	2	3	4	5
Poor	Fair	Satisfactory	Good	Excellent

Responsibility

1    2    3    4    5

Self-Esteem

1    2    3    4    5

Social Skills

1    2    3    4    5

Being a Team Player

1    2    3    4    5

Self-Directed

1    2    3    4    5

Leadership

1    2    3    4    5

College/Continuing Education Preparation

1	2	3	4	5
Poor	Fair	Satisfactory	Good	Excellent

Study Skills

1    2    3    4    5

Note Taking Skills

1    2    3    4    5

Test Taking Skills

1    2    3    4    5

What were the three most important things you learned while attending this charter school?

- 1
- 2
- 3

Were there broader life skills and/or knowledge you needed to reach your future goals, but did not receive while attending this charter school?

Yes            No

Explain:

Do you feel that the charter school experience gave you any advantages over your college classmates?

Yes            No

Explain:

Do you feel that the charter school experience gave you any advantages over your peers in your career after graduation?

Yes            No

Explain:

Do you feel that the charter school experience gave you any advantages over your peers in life?

Yes            No

Explain:

Do you feel that this charter school prepared you to reach your goals after graduation?

Yes            No

Explain:

Through your experiences at the Minnesota New Country School, do you feel that the school fulfilled its mission?

‘Minnesota New Country School is a learning community committed to quality personalized project based learning with demonstrated achievement.’

Yes            No

Explain:

How do you define success?

Is there any additional information you feel is important to share?

Are you willing to participate in an individual interview and/or focus group to help us expand on the information we’ve gathered through this survey?

Yes            No