

***U.S. Department of Education***  
***2021 National Blue Ribbon Schools Program***

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[X] Public or [ ] Non-public

For Public Schools only: (Check all that apply) [X] Title I [ ] Charter [ ] Magnet [ ] Choice

Name of Principal Mr. Gary Franklin  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., etc.) (As it should appear in the official records)

Official School Name Northwestern Regional High School  
(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 100 Battistoni Drive  
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Winsted State CT Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 06098-1899

County Litchfield County

Telephone (860) 379-8525 Fax (860) 738-6059

Web site/URL https://www.nwr7.com/ E-mail gfranklin@nwr7.org

I have reviewed the information in this application, including the eligibility requirements on page 2 (Part I-Eligibility Certification), and certify, to the best of my knowledge, that it is accurate.

Date \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
(Principal's Signature)

Name of Superintendent\* Dr. Judith Palmer E-mail jpalmer@nwr7.org  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Regional School District 07 Tel. (860) 379-8525

I have reviewed the information in this application, including the eligibility requirements on page 2 (Part I-Eligibility Certification), and certify, to the best of my knowledge, that it is accurate.

Date \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
(Superintendent's Signature)

Name of School Board President/Chairperson Ms. Molly Sexton Read  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

I have reviewed the information in this application, including the eligibility requirements on page 2 (Part I-Eligibility Certification), and certify, to the best of my knowledge, that it is accurate.

Date \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
(School Board President's/Chairperson's Signature)

The original signed cover sheet only should be converted to a PDF file and uploaded via the online portal.

*\*Non-public Schools: If the information requested is not applicable, leave blank.*

## **PART I – ELIGIBILITY CERTIFICATION**

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The electronic signature on the first page of this application (cover page) certify that each of the statements below, concerning the school’s eligibility and compliance with U.S. Department of Education and National Blue Ribbon Schools requirements, are true and correct.

1. All nominated public schools must meet the state’s performance targets in reading (or English language arts) and mathematics and other academic indicators (i.e., attendance rate and graduation rate), for the all students group, including having participation rates of at least 95 percent using the most recent accountability results available for nomination.
2. To meet final eligibility, all nominated public schools must be certified by states prior to September 2021 in order to meet all eligibility requirements. Any status appeals must be resolved at least two weeks before the awards ceremony for the school to receive the award.
3. The school configuration must include one or more of grades K-12. Schools located on the same campus (physical location and mailing address) must apply as an entire school (i.e. K-8; 6-12; K-12 school). Two (or more) schools located on separate campuses, must apply individually even if they have the same principal. A single school located on multiple campuses with one principal must apply as an entire school.
4. The school has been in existence for five full years, that is, from at least September 2015 and grades participating in statewide assessments must have been part of the school for at least the three years prior to September 2019.
5. The nominated school has not received the National Blue Ribbon Schools award in the past five years: 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019 or 2020.
6. The nominated school has no history of testing irregularities, nor have charges of irregularities been brought against the school at the time of nomination. If irregularities are later discovered and proven by the state, the U.S. Department of Education reserves the right to disqualify a school’s application and/or rescind a school’s award.
7. The nominated school has not been identified by the state as “persistently dangerous” within the last two years.
8. The nominated school or district is not refusing Office of Civil Rights (OCR) access to information necessary to investigate a civil rights complaint or to conduct a district-wide compliance review.
9. The OCR has not issued a violation letter of findings to the school district concluding that the nominated school or the district as a whole has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes. A violation letter of findings will not be considered outstanding if OCR has accepted a corrective action plan from the district to remedy the violation.
10. The U.S. Department of Justice does not have a pending suit alleging that the nominated school or the school district, as a whole, has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes or the Constitution’s equal protection clause.
11. There are no findings of violations of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in a U.S. Department of Education monitoring report that apply to the school or school district in question; or if there are such findings, the state or district has corrected, or agreed to correct, the findings.

## PART II - DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

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Data should be provided for the current school year (2020-2021) unless otherwise stated.

**DISTRICT** (Question 1 is not applicable to non-public schools.)

1. Number of schools in the district (per district designation):
- 0 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
  - 1 Middle/Junior high schools
  - 1 High schools
  - 0 K-12 schools
- 2 TOTAL

**SCHOOL** (To be completed by all schools. Only include demographic data for the nominated school, not the district.)

2. Category that best describes the area where the school is located. If unsure, refer to NCES database for correct category: <https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/schoolsearch/> (Find your school and check “Locale”)

- Urban (city or town)
- Suburban
- Rural

3. Number of students as of October 1, 2020 enrolled at each grade level or its equivalent at the school. Include all students enrolled, in-person, participating in a hybrid model, or online only. If online schooling or other COVID-19 school issues make this difficult to obtain, provide the most accurate and up-to-date information available:

Grade	# of Males	# of Females	Grade Total
PreK	0	0	0
K	0	0	0
1	0	0	0
2	0	0	0
3	0	0	0
4	0	0	0
5	0	0	0
6	0	0	0
7	0	0	0
8	0	0	0
9	70	78	148
10	69	97	166
11	85	94	179
12 or higher	103	103	206
<b>Total Students</b>	327	372	699

\*Schools that house PreK programs should count preschool students **only** if the school administration is responsible for the program.

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school (if unknown, estimate):
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
  - 0.9 % Asian
  - 0.7 % Black or African American
  - 3.3 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 0.3 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 93.1 % White
  - 1.7 % Two or more races
  - 100 % Total**

(Only these seven standard categories should be used to report the racial/ethnic composition of your school. The Final Guidance on Maintaining, Collecting, and Reporting Racial and Ethnic Data to the U.S. Department of Education published in the October 19, 2007 *Federal Register* provides definitions for each of the seven categories.)

5. Student turnover, or mobility rate, during the 2019 - 2020 school year: 3%

If the mobility rate is above 15%, please explain:

This rate should be calculated using the grid below. The answer to (6) is the mobility rate.

<b>Steps For Determining Mobility Rate</b>	<b>Answer</b>
(1) Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year	8
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year	16
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	24
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2019	699
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.03
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	3

6. Specify each non-English language represented in the school (separate languages by commas):

Spanish, Serbo-Croatian

English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 0 %  
2 Total number ELL

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 22 %

Total number students who qualify: 154

8. Students receiving special education services: 17 %

116 Total number of students served

Indicate below the number of students with disabilities according to conditions designated in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Do not add additional conditions. All students receiving special education services should be reflected in the table below. It is possible that students may be classified in more than one condition.

<u>13</u> Autism	<u>5</u> Multiple Disabilities
<u>0</u> Deafness	<u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment
<u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness	<u>25</u> Other Health Impaired
<u>0</u> Developmental Delay	<u>46</u> Specific Learning Disability
<u>15</u> Emotional Disturbance	<u>4</u> Speech or Language Impairment
<u>0</u> Hearing Impairment	<u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury
<u>7</u> Intellectual Disability	<u>1</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 1

10. Use Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), rounded to the nearest whole numeral, to indicate the number of school staff in each of the categories below. If your current staffing structure has shifted due to COVID-19 impacts and you are uncertain or unable to determine FTEs, provide an estimate.

	<b>Number of Staff</b>
Administrators	3
Classroom teachers, including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	59
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	7
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	27
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	8

11. Average student-classroom teacher ratio, that is, the number of students in the school divided by the FTE of classroom teachers, e.g., 22:1 12:1

12. Show daily student attendance rates. Only high schools need to supply yearly graduation rates.

<b>Required Information</b>	2019-2020	2018-2019	2017-2018	2016-2017	2015-2016
Daily student attendance	95%	96%	96%	96%	97%
High school graduation rate	100%	100%	100%	100%	99%

13. **For high schools only, that is, schools ending in grade 12 or higher.**

Show percentages to indicate the post-secondary status of students who graduated in Spring 2020.

<b>Post-Secondary Status</b>	
Graduating class size	158
Enrolled in a 4-year college or university	63%
Enrolled in a community college	20%
Enrolled in career/technical training program	3%
Found employment	5%
Joined the military or other public service	3%
Other	6%

14. Indicate whether your school has previously received a National Blue Ribbon Schools award.  
 Yes  No

If yes, select the year in which your school received the award.

15. In a couple of sentences, provide the school’s mission or vision statement.

Northwestern Regional High School fosters academic and personal excellence in every student. In partnership with families and communities, we create a safe learning environment dedicated to developing the skills of lifelong learning. Our dynamic and challenging educational program prepares individuals to respect diversity and become responsible citizens in a rapidly evolving global environment.

16. Briefly describe how your school has been operating during the current 2020-2021 school year (e.g., open as usual, online only, a hybrid model, etc.)? If different grade levels in your building operate in different ways, include this. If the school began with one model and switched to another partially through the year, include this as well.

In preparation for the 2020-2021 school year, Northwestern developed three learning models: distance learning, hybrid, and full in-person. Our school started the year in the hybrid model. In this model, our student body was divided into two cohorts. While one cohort attended school in-person, the other cohort would follow our school schedule and join their classes remotely. Families had the option of full-time distance learning for their child.

Northwestern transitioned to the distance learning model on November 30th and returned to the hybrid model on January 11th. On March 15th, Northwestern moved to the full in-person learning model.

17. **For public schools only**, if the school is a magnet, charter, or choice school, explain how students are chosen to attend.

Students interested in the Agricultural Education program from outside our school community would submit an application for review. A committee would review the applications and accept students based on the established criteria.

## **PART III - SUMMARY**

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Nestled in the beautiful Litchfield hills, Northwestern Regional High School is located in the northwest corner of Connecticut, 20 miles west of the state capital city, Hartford. Covering a sprawling 157 square miles, Regional School District No. 7 was established in 1958 to provide a 7-12 education for students of four quaint towns that embody inland New England: Barkhamsted, Colebrook, New Hartford, and Norfolk, with a combined population of 13,342. Northwestern is also a designated school for neighboring Hartland, and students from the towns of Winchester, Torrington, Granby, and Canton apply to attend Northwestern's National Chapter Award winning Agricultural Education program. Northwestern is a high-performing, comprehensive public school that serves approximately 700 students who are assigned alphabetically to two Houses. This unique house structure creates a personalized experience for staff, families, and students to build lasting, supportive relationships over four years. Students are connected to the adults in the building, whether through our house structure or through other elements, such as our daily extended homeroom where teachers and students develop a supportive community. Because we receive students from many towns throughout the region, it is essential that we begin to build our community before the first day of school. Link Crew is a student leadership program that connects upperclassmen with freshmen to ease the transition from middle school to high school. Link Leaders implement a community-building summer orientation, ensure academic development, offer social and emotional support, help to build character, and make long-lasting connections with freshmen. The school's curriculum is flexible and encompassing, offering numerous semester classes and full-year courses at introductory through advanced levels. Academically, Northwestern students are among the highest performing in the state. Northwestern ensures all students have access to high quality enrichment programs to connect students to the school community, offering award-winning music, theater, and arts programs, highly successful athletic teams, and meaningful student engagement. Student voice is imperative in adding new activities, such as e-sports and Northwestern's Robotics Team, which premiered in 2011 and won the New England Regional Championship in 2014. Our highly skilled mentors are crucial partners in this work, which inspired additional science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) course offerings, including robotics. Northwestern students initiated and founded a Social Justice Club in order to share and implement their vision for an even more inclusive experience and a better life for all people. As partners in this work, our staff has created a Social Justice Committee which provides additional opportunities for professional growth in the areas of having difficult conversations about race with students, and recognizing and celebrating the contributions of diverse cultures within the curriculum. Students and staff have enjoyed collaborating regularly to achieve our collective goals. Social and emotional learning (SEL) is the foundation for our positive school culture and enhances our students' ability to succeed in school and in life. All staff have been trained in RULER (Recognize, Understand, Label, Express, Regulate), a systemic approach to SEL developed by the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence. In light of COVID-19, Yale offered Northwestern free access to "Social and Emotional Learning in Times of Uncertainty and Stress: Research-Based Strategies," a course designed for educators to support their own social and emotional health, providing strategies and coping mechanisms for staff to implement in their lives and with students. Kindness in Motion is a unique, award-winning program that was instituted in 2015. It was recognized by InspirEd, Facebook, and the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence in 2016. Parents, students, and administrators attended the InspirED Social and Emotional Learning Summit in San Diego where Northwestern accepted the InspirED Award. Kindness in Motion is a mini-grant program for students to plan and implement a project that will improve the lives of others. Many students use their privately funded grant as seed money and raise thousands of dollars for their cause. Projects have had a global impact, as evidenced by our school initiative to install a clean drinking water well in South Sudan and sending handmade dolls to an orphanage in China, supplies to a school in Gambia, and soccer balls to children in Ecuador. Individual student projects have also made a significant impact in our community. One student's project rebuilt a collapsed deck for an elderly neighbor. Sizeable donations have been made to many service organizations, food pantries, homeless shelters, and hospitals. Kindness in Motion provides an opportunity for students to use their voices to address a societal need in a way that connects with their passions. Many projects have grown out of classroom ideas that students and teachers develop together. One of our art teachers and her students created ceramic bowls to support Guiding Light Orphans, an organization that helps teach Ugandan women to craft garments and make soap. This experience empowers them to earn their own income that will ultimately transform their lives. Northwestern is a family and we value the partnership with our school community. We support our students

and staff by putting families first, and we treat each other with the kindness, compassion, and care that we would extend to our own loved ones. This is what makes Northwestern a home and why we are known as “the pride of the northwest corner.”



## **PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION**

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### **1. Core Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.**

Northwestern's English curriculum is grounded in the skill development outlined in the Common Core Standards and drives common assessments at the culmination of each unit of study and for midterm and final exams. Students experience a scaffolded curriculum in both 9th and 10th grade at every level, with honors courses incorporating paired texts. In the 11th and 12th grades, students' options for courses expand to include Advanced Placement (AP) Language and Composition or AP Literature and Composition. By senior year, all students electing not to take AP Literature and Composition or an honors course participate in Writing Workshop in the fall and one or more spring courses based on student interest: Poetry Seminar, Public Speaking, or World Literature.

In light of the Covid-19 pandemic, the English Department prioritized skills and units that are most impactful to students. The current curriculum in each course has been modified to ensure the integration of critical communication and empathy skills. Each team of teachers continues to meet regularly to examine student work and progress while also discussing the modifications that have been made and adjusting to address new needs. English teachers report positive shifts in their teaching as all lessons have become much more deliberate, clear, and articulated as we ensure all students, whether learning in person or remotely, have easy access to instruction. Teachers utilize hyperdocs, PearDeck, and the Google Suite to motivate students, encourage respectful discourse, and monitor progress to provide all students with feedback to assist in their growth toward exceeding expectations. Teachers report that Google Suite has been especially helpful in providing timely, specific feedback in writing. The lengthened class periods have made learning both targeted and complete as teachers increased their use of skill activities during initiation and incorporated conscientious closure to each daily lesson.

The Mathematics Department promotes the growth and development of each individual student through the application of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics Standards and the Connecticut Mathematics Frameworks in all classes. Essential knowledge and skills include appropriate math content, problem solving, cooperative grouping, technology, performance assessment, and oral and written presentations. Northwestern's robust course offerings provide a foundation with core classes in Algebra and Geometry. Students also have the opportunity to take Statistics, Pre-Calculus, Introduction to Computer Science, AP Computer Science, AP Statistics, and AP Calculus during their high school career.

The classroom environment is built around a discovery and application approach to mathematics. Students are expected to experiment, investigate, conjecture, communicate, and make presentations on a regular basis. Problem solving occurs in both individual and cooperative group settings with graphing calculators and computers used to enhance learning. Student assessment takes many forms: from performance based projects to written tests and from classroom participation to student portfolios.

Math teachers review student PSAT results and identify specific skill areas that need to be addressed and develop Student Learning Objectives (SLO's), instructional strategies, and interventions to meet these needs. Utilizing resources such as Khan Academy and embracing a mastery-based approach, Northwestern's math SAT scores have consistently ranked among the best in Connecticut.

Math teachers have integrated the use of breakout rooms in Google Meet to facilitate collaborative group work and problem solving between in-person and distance-learning students. This has proven to be a valuable formative assessment tool and has provided real-time data used to inform instruction.

The social studies curriculum prepares students for citizenship in the 21st century. To this end, the department provides every student the opportunity to enhance skills in reading, listening, speaking, writing, and research. Students acquire a comprehensive understanding of the human experience, both past and present, and realize the importance of the role of individual decision making in influencing the future in our World Civilizations and U.S. History courses. As contributors to our changing society, our students gain an in-depth understanding of how our society is governed and the critical role of the individual citizen in this democratic system while also developing an awareness of the complexity of problems which face the

contemporary world. Due to their experience in our Civics and Contemporary issues courses, our students develop a willingness to become part of the solution to these societal issues. Through an inquiry-based approach, students practice democratic values which emphasize civic responsibility, participation, and acceptance of the diverse peoples of the world.

Social Studies teachers have created a challenging curriculum which engages students in their own learning. Across all grade levels and learning models, students actively participate in class discussions, moderated debates, and critical analysis of current events and primary sources that require evidence to support their positions. Northwestern's Social Studies Department offers popular electives such as Psychology, Law and Justice, and History vs. Hollywood. Students also enjoy the benefits of five AP courses within the department: AP U.S. History, AP Psychology, AP American Government and Politics, AP Comparative Politics, and AP Modern European History.

Northwestern's Science Department supports the development of scientifically literate citizens who are able to adjust to a rapidly changing world, make informed decisions, and face the challenges of our technological society. Students learn that the unknown can be explained in an orderly and logical manner, and this requires developing faith in the scientific method as a means of solving daily problems.

In addition to the core course offerings in science, students enjoy a rich selection of electives, such as Forensic Science, Seminar in Biotechnology, and AP Physics. Students in Forensic Science have worked closely with the Connecticut State Crime Lab and their Mobile Crime Unit and our students actively work on simulated crime scenes to find evidence. In our science courses, each student applies research as a means of providing solutions to society's problems and the potential to participate in these solutions. Students learn about science-related issues that have a bearing on responsible daily living. The core components of our science courses are: awareness of health, safety, the stewardship of the natural resources of our planet, the increasing role of technology and science in everyday life, and an aesthetic appreciation of both the technological and natural environment that will nurture global consciousness and understanding.

Our Science Department has aligned curriculum with the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) and has developed integrated instructional units with NGSS-like assessments that are focused upon performance expectations and phenomena related to the core areas that students will investigate in our courses.

All teachers reflect on the effectiveness of instruction and continuously analyze assessment results in order to modify instructional strategies to attain the stated learning and performance objectives. The Mathematics and English Departments incorporate SAT style formative assessments into the curriculum. The social studies, science, and career and technical subjects, including art, focus on developing reading, writing, speaking, listening, research, and critical thinking skills within the content area that are required for success on the SAT and in post-secondary education. As a result, Northwestern students have consistently performed among the best in the state in overall SAT performance.

### **1a. For secondary schools (middle and/or high school grades):**

Due to the success of our academic programs and the high level of student achievement, the Connecticut State Department of Education designated Northwestern as a High School of Distinction for High Performance in both 2017-18 and 2018-19, earning us a reputation for academic excellence. The College Board also recognized Northwestern for increasing access to AP courses while maintaining pass rates, and the University of Connecticut (UConn) recognized Northwestern for expanding Early College Experience (ECE) class offerings, with an enrollment increase of 115% for the 2020-21 school year.

Northwestern participates in the High School Partnership Program with Northwestern Connecticut Community College to provide students with an opportunity to earn dual credit, as students are eligible to enroll in two courses per semester at no charge. Agricultural Education (AgEd) students may also receive dual credit through partnerships with both UConn and the State University of New York Cobleskill.

Future Farmers of America (FFA) is among the largest youth organizations in the United States and prepares our AgEd students for premier leadership, personal growth, and career success. AgEd works to prepare

students for future careers in agriculture through three integral components: classroom and laboratory work, FFA involvement, and Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE).

Northwestern's Capstone Project is a graduation requirement through which students demonstrate valuable research, problem-solving, and communication skills as a way to help our students identify and pursue their passion while providing them the opportunity to learn and practice critical skills in preparation for college or career.

The New Hartford Business Council has promoted career exploration with students participating in our internship program. As part of their internship, students enjoy the benefit of gaining real-world experience, enhancing their resume, and adding networking contacts and opportunities while earning credit toward graduation. In addition, our honors banking program is offered for students to gain experience in developing employability skills, work ethic, and money-management skills through training and employment as a teller in an on-campus bank branch of Northwest Community Bank.

### **1b. For schools that offer preschool for three- and/or four-year old students:**

## **2. Other Curriculum Areas:**

Northwestern's award winning performance arts programs offer over 25 courses and extracurricular activities in the areas of music, art, and theater. Our Music Department is dedicated to providing a vibrant learning environment that fosters intellectual achievement, civic responsibility, and personal growth. Local, regional, and nationally renowned guest conductors work with each ensemble on campus, which provides students with a variety of perspectives on music as well as giving our teachers vital professional development. The Music Parents Association helps provide funding for guest composers and the commission of new works for our ensembles. Nearly 180 students (approximately 25% of the student body) participate in our performing ensembles. More than 50 students annually earn inclusion in All-County, Regional, State, New England, All-Eastern, and National festival ensembles. Nine students were selected for the 2020 All-State Music Festival. In the past 20 years, 11 students have earned National Association for Music Education (NAfME) All-Eastern Honors and eight different students have earned placement in All-National Honor Ensembles. In art courses, the development of individual expression is emphasized. Students have been recognized at local and regional levels for their original work and they consistently explore concepts to solve a myriad of visual problems. Northwestern students have won awards at the Scholastic Art Awards Show and the Congressional Art Competition in recent years. Our theater program showcases our student's ability to perform, manage, construct, and promote our high-quality fall and spring productions. Our theater students have received individual recognition due to performance and set design.

Due to the pandemic, Northwestern's band and chorus students created a virtual winter concert, with students recording each individual piece for submission. Our music teachers, in collaboration with an audio engineer, edited the pieces together for the final product. This year's outdoor spring concert will be live streamed due to limited in-person capacity. Northwestern's theater students created a radio show, A Christmas Carol, for their winter theater production. Students performing in the spring production will be using their experience during the pandemic as a source of inspiration. Designed to demonstrate the resilience of the human spirit in the face of adversity, each student will choose a song, monologue, or dance piece that represents how they persevered through difficult times.

Our Physical Education (PE) Department offers our students flexibility, providing an engaging atmosphere that enhances the overall experience by offering multiple options for student activity at all grade levels. Students work on individual fitness goals, participate in team games and competitions, and practice yoga and pilates in small groups. Our PE teachers integrate activities connected to stress-management skills, personal wellness, mindfulness and mental health throughout the curriculum. Child Development is an elective for upperclassmen that teaches students about physical, cognitive, and emotional development of children. Students tend to Real Care babies to gain a simulated childcare experience. During the pandemic, remote learners joined their in-person peers in many of the class activities and teachers differentiated

instruction and adapted assessments to meet the needs of individual students.

Our World Language Department stresses proficiency in communication that is developed through listening, speaking, reading and writing activities at all levels of our Spanish, Italian, and Chinese courses. As skills develop, students have the opportunity to take UConn ECE Italian and Spanish courses. Northwestern is committed to helping our students recognize their own culture and make them more knowledgeable of and sympathetic to the diversity in our own country and in the international community through the study of world language. Students plan World Language Week to create opportunities for our school to celebrate different cultures through film and music. The National Foreign Language Honor Society induction ceremony is planned by current members.

Northwestern's Technology Department caters to a student's individual passion and offers a project-based, hands-on experience in a variety of electives. Students in all grade levels build and refine skills in many areas, including graphic design, construction, masonry, and robotics. Video Production students have played an important role in keeping our school community connected during the pandemic. In addition to working on critical skills in broadcasting and film, our students worked with our local public access television station while live-streaming sporting events. Our students have also added content to our Highlander Life YouTube channel and created videos to help promote Northwestern's Unified Sports program. Students exhibiting advanced skills and competencies in the areas of construction, masonry, technology, and home design can earn credit through independent study or as a teaching assistant.

In response to the pandemic, Northwestern technology teachers have developed innovative ways to reach our students regardless of the learning model. Distance learning students in construction classes selected wood model options on Amazon for delivery to their homes in order to engage in the building process, while our robotics teacher assembled pre-packaged kits for students to continue to apply STEM skills while learning from home.

### **3. Academic Supports:**

In order to ensure the success of all students, teachers provide academic support delivered through Mathematics and English Help Centers throughout the school day. In addition, teachers offer extra help sessions on Monday and Thursday afternoons. Northwestern's National Honor Society (NHS) has developed a program through which all students can access peer-to-peer tutoring during the school day. The goal of this program is to encourage collaboration and elevate the academic performance of all students. As part of the process, NHS students created a website that allows students to connect with a student mentor for each subject area and meet with them during a mutually convenient class period in their schedule.

Northwestern partners with Shared Services (SS), a Cooperative Education Service Center (CESC), to provide specialized programming, services, and special education staff in order to support our learners with special needs. Learning, Independence, New Knowledge, and Skills (LINKS) is one of the special education programs at Northwestern made available through SS. With intensive supports and services, LINKS guides students toward their individualized goals and helps them to achieve their highest potential, both academically and socially. In addition, LINKS offers transition and vocational experiences to enhance transferable skills to adulthood.

Also made available to Northwestern through SS, Achieving Independence Mechanism (AIM) is a specialized program designed for students aged 14 to 18 with mild intellectual disabilities and secondary learning impairments. We provide a sequential schedule of classes to meet specific learning needs to prepare students for success after graduation with an emphasis placed on pre-vocational and vocational skills.

Northwestern's alternative education program, Students in Transitional Educational Placement (STEP) provides an opportunity for general and special education students whose needs require a

supplemental after-school program to graduate. STEP is highly individualized and tailored to meet the academic, social, and emotional needs of each student.

Beyond the traditional school year, Northwestern provides opportunities for students to earn and recover credit over the summer. Our Summer Institute for Learning runs for three weeks, offering core courses and electives during two sessions per day. Students who need to recover course credits are invited to attend. In addition, incoming 9th graders are invited to participate in our Algebra Readiness Camp which meets for two weeks in the summer. The goal of this program is to increase mastery of arithmetic and pre-algebra skills to ensure success in high school mathematics. Students who complete the camp earn one-half STEM credit toward high school graduation. This program is available at no cost to students and families.

Our Credit Enhancement program provides students an opportunity to augment their credit standing, ease their course load for the following academic year, or catch up on graduation requirements. Courses such as Literature through Film, Personal Wellness, Culinary, Virtual Tour of Europe, Theater, and Youth Mental Health First Aid have been offered through Credit Enhancement. This program is also offered at no cost to students and families.

Very few English Language Learners (ELL) attend Northwestern. For students in need of ELL services, we provide highly trained specialists to develop and deliver individualized programs to enhance and support language development.

## **PART V – SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE**

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### **1. Engaging Students:**

At Northwestern, we believe that a positive school climate is an essential component to a successful educational experience, and we value students as partners to ensure they enjoy academic, social, and emotional growth and success. As a result, we provide an environment rich in opportunities for students to lead, follow their passion, have fun, and make a positive impact on their school community.

Student Council plays a critical role in enhancing the overall day-to-day experience by providing many leadership opportunities through four committees: Acts of Kindness, Community Outreach, School Climate, and Immediate Causes/Charity Relief. To make a positive impact on our school community, students organize events and activities, such as Trick or Treat on the Hill which transforms our campus into a destination for hundreds of young children from our four towns. During the pandemic, our students enjoyed decorating our campus and dressing in costumes to provide an opportunity for young children and families to safely trick-or-treat. Prior to Thanksgiving, the Community Outreach Committee hosts food drives and assembles baskets with all the ingredients for a turkey dinner for families in need. Despite the pandemic, Northwestern was able to provide 43 baskets and a sizable donation of food to the local soup kitchen. Our Student Council also works with the American Red Cross to organize two blood drives each year.

In addition to their service-oriented work, Northwestern's Student Council organizes many exciting, fun events. Spirit Week engages all students in special themes for each day of the week, culminating in a schoolwide hallway decorating contest on Thursday, a pep rally on Friday, and a Homecoming dance on Saturday. Members of the School Climate Committee write encouraging messages for students and place them on lockers and also plan teacher appreciation events.

Northwestern organizes a regional School Climate Summit where students from area schools participate in workshops and seminars aimed at promoting a positive school climate and enhancing the school experience for all students. Further, our students work with administrators to organize our "Surprise Squad" to recognize students exhibiting the characteristics that we value at Northwestern, such as kindness and compassion. The "Surprise Squad" enthusiastically enters the classroom with music playing, shares the reasons why the student was nominated for the recognition, and presents the honoree with a gift bag. The Surprise Squad has become an exciting part of our culture.

In our distance learning model, we were able to remain connected and keep students engaged. Administrators and class advisors held regular virtual class meetings and coordinated virtual student activities, such as our senior class bingo night. Our class elections were held virtually with recorded speeches by our candidates and voting through Google Forms. Important events for students and families, such as our Highlander Welcome Night, Open House, and Curriculum Night, were also held virtually, providing opportunities for students and families to interact with administrators, teachers, and school staff.

Northwestern offers over 30 inclusive extracurricular activities and clubs to connect all students with our school. Our Unified Sports program includes people with and without intellectual disabilities on the same team, while the Northwestern Gay-Straight Alliance promotes equality, understanding, and empathy among students and staff. Boomshakalaka is an art therapy club that was developed for students who were struggling to maintain engagement during the pandemic. Many of our students are motivated to participate in extracurricular activities at Northwestern due to personal career interests and/or their desire to develop skills, as evidenced by the participation in our debate, robotics, art, and culinary clubs.

### **2. Engaging Families and Community:**

Families, community members, and business leaders are collaborative partners in supporting our students and improving our school. Our high school administrative team requested representatives from all stakeholders to participate in a committee to create our collective "Vision of the Graduate." This committee, composed of parents, students, teachers, business leaders, clergy, and the president of Northwestern

Connecticut Community College, met with school administrators regularly over the course of several months to discuss the characteristics and attributes necessary to prepare a Northwestern graduate for college, career, and life.

During this past year, our administrative team developed multiple pathways for engagement and communication with parents and families through a series of virtual meetings and webinars about the following topics: synchronous learning, contact tracing and close contacts, social and emotional learning, and the three established learning models during the pandemic. During these virtual meetings, parents had the opportunity to interact and ask clarifying questions. The technology team recorded and uploaded all meetings to Northwestern's YouTube channel. The principal sent monthly videos to seniors and their parents and held individual and small group meetings to provide updates on student activities. In addition, administrators sent surveys to parents to collect data to inform decision making.

Our high school has several active social media accounts that provide students, families, and community members with information about school activities and events, announcements about parent webinars and opportunities to get involved, and notifications in honor of student achievement. Due to COVID-related restrictions, the Athletic Department partnered with Video Production students to live-stream games on our Facebook page, which has over 1,600 followers. In addition, the principal issues a weekly newsletter, "News from the Hill," which has been a consistent source of communication with families for many years. The "News from the Hill" is used to communicate important School Counseling and Athletic Department news as well as other critical and timely information.

Many community partnerships have been established to support our students and families. Northwestern works closely with Northwest Hills Prevention Connection in order to prevent youth substance abuse in our region. Through this partnership, we have been able to coordinate and host student and parent seminars on the dangers of vaping, opioid addiction, and supporting youth mental health. Northwestern has also established a partnership with the Connecticut Junior Republic Wellness Center, which provides timely mental health services for students and families. This program provides the opportunity to have access to these critical services in a familiar setting and convenient location outside of school hours. Northwestern also works collaboratively with the Winchester Youth Services Bureau in providing additional services, therapeutic recreational programs, and a court diversion program for juvenile first offenders and their families within our learning community.

In conjunction with the administrative team, the Student Council organized our first annual Highlander Food Truck Festival, a family-friendly event with inflatables, music, games, and food that provides an opportunity for our school community to come together and connect in a fun environment and raise funds to support our Kindness in Motion program.

### **3. Creating Professional Culture:**

At Northwestern, teachers are valued professionals, relied on for their insight, expertise, and critical information about our students. They are trusted partners in regards to professional development. Administrators seek feedback from our teachers on a regular basis and have established a comfortable, open-door environment that encourages the sharing of ideas on academic planning, behavioral intervention, and restorative practices. Through our collaborative working relationship, our teachers are valued and supported. Northwestern relied heavily on teacher insight as we reopened our school in the midst of the pandemic. As part of the reopening process, our superintendent of schools created a Reopening Committee which was composed of various stakeholders, including teachers. As a key component of the work, our teachers formed the Teaching and Learning Subcommittee, which proved vital to our overall success in transitioning to and from each learning model this year. In this committee, our teachers had the opportunity to voice concerns, identify problems, brainstorm ideas, and propose solutions to the challenges we faced. Through their unique lens as classroom teachers, they were able to decide on the online learning platform for our students as well as the synchronous method of delivering instruction during our hybrid learning model. The Teaching and Learning Subcommittee has been a critical part of our success in reopening our school and will remain instrumental in developing a new schedule for the 2021-22 school year. Our professional development plan has been created and facilitated by our teachers. Two members of the English Department co-chair the

Professional Development Committee (PDEC) and work closely with administration. Our PDEC elicits feedback from teachers to support needs and advance professional growth. This committee creates a catalog of offerings for each professional development day, where many of our highly skilled teachers lead workshop sessions. Teachers also have the option to submit a Professional Development Learning Proposal (PDLP) if they prefer to create a more individualized, self-directed experience. Without the work of PDEC, our high school would have been unable to reopen in such a smooth and efficient manner. The workshops on new instructional technology, such as Google Classroom, EdPuzzle, and Screencastify, as well as the flexibility with the PDLP offerings, allowed teachers to feel confident when transitioning to our hybrid learning model. Teachers are also encouraged to look for off-campus or virtual professional development opportunities that support their growth as educators and collaborators within their departments. Our teachers have participated in department-specific state and national conferences as well as workshops with a focus on social justice. These opportunities have led to the development of new student activities and clubs as well as the integration of new content into the curriculum. Teachers new to the district participate in our staff orientation where administrators review the structure of the high school, policies, and teacher responsibilities, but the majority of our orientation involves teachers interacting with one another and learning about the RULER approach to SEL. The training emphasizes why emotions matter, the importance of managing and regulating our emotions as adults, and how to help our students learn these skills. Regularly scheduled follow-up meetings occur throughout the school year to review the teacher evaluation process, the support offered through the Teacher Education and Mentoring program (TEAM), and to answer any questions they may have during their first year in the building.

#### **4. School Leadership:**

Northwestern's administrative team enjoys the full support of the Regional School District No. 7 Board of Education. The leadership structure at Northwestern consists of one high school principal and two assistant principals. Our high school administrative team serves as instructional leaders, primary teacher evaluators, testing coordinators, and student activity directors. The principal of the high school also serves as the Title IX Coordinator. Each department is led by a chairperson who works with the administrative team in developing their budget and department-specific initiatives as well as writing and revising curriculum and identifying strategies to enhance instructional practices and student achievement. Within the department, teachers collaborate in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) to share resources, plan instruction, develop SLOs, create assessments, and review student achievement data, which is shared with the high school administrative team.

The Child Study Team (CST) identifies students who need academic, behavioral, social and/or emotional support. Students are referred to our CST by certified staff based on academic or behavioral concerns. A team of administrators, school counselors, and support staff meet on a regular basis to review referrals to determine the interventions needed for each student. Once interventions are determined, case managers monitor student progress, report back to the team, and increase or decrease interventions as needed. The principal shares student progress reports at bi-weekly meetings with the superintendent of schools.

At Northwestern, we value a collaborative, team approach in working with all stakeholders. Our leadership philosophy is grounded in restorative practices and SEL, which supports our empathetic approach in working with students and families. As a school, we value personal growth and providing students with an opportunity to restore any harm that was done due to a specific behavior, rather than focusing on punitive measures. Administrators and teachers have facilitated and participated in restorative conversations with students and families which have resulted in positive outcomes.

Our teachers and administrators also work closely with students in developing critical SEL skills. In addition to the SEL components that have been integrated into classes, the high school organizes a seminar for incoming 9th grade students. The seminar builds on the skills learned in middle school and provides an opportunity for our students to participate in workshops on why emotions matter, recognizing emotions, the meta-moment, developing empathy, and being their best selves. Through our continued work in restorative practices and SEL training, we create a safe, welcoming environment that fosters individual student growth and achievement.



Administrators have worked together to keep Northwestern safe and functioning during the pandemic in a variety of ways. First, administrators recognize that all students and staff want to feel safe and protected while in the building. Central and business office staff, custodians, and administrators identified the necessary personal protective equipment (PPE) and sanitizing materials to keep everyone safe and protected within the building. In addition, our custodial staff conducted a capacity study of the building to ensure compliance with CDC and local area health district guidelines. Administrators instituted a staggered passing period and redesigned the traffic flow within the building to decrease areas of congestion. One of our administrators also serves as our district COVID-19 Health and Safety Liaison, collaborating with our school nurses in sharing our suite of mitigation strategies and other critical health and safety information with our staff, students, and families.

In addition to making changes to the physical school building and daily practices to keep our school safe, administrators recognized the importance of working with our students and staff to ensure an emotionally safe environment. Emotions matter and people experienced the trauma associated with the pandemic in different ways. It has been critical to listen, understand, and validate, supporting our students and staff as they process the events that have unfolded over the past year.

## **5. Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning:**

Our work to ensure equity, cultural awareness, and respect in the classroom and school starts with the charter that teachers create with their students. As part of our RULER approach to SEL, teachers work with students in each class to develop a set of norms and expectations that they agree to follow during each class period. In addition, students and teachers discuss how they want to feel each day in class and steps that they will take if the charter is not being followed. Teachers and administrators create a schoolwide charter at the beginning of each school year in preparation for this work. Northwestern believes that it is important for the adults in the building to engage in SEL work, as well as social justice, in order to build capacity for ensuring that every member of the school community feels valued and respected. As a school, Northwestern recognizes the importance of addressing controversial and/or political events in a thoughtful and responsible manner. For example, as the events of the insurrection in Washington D.C. were unfolding, district administrators met to discuss the best approach to take at a school level and on a microlevel in the classroom. High school administrators met specifically with members of the Social Studies Department to collaborate on the structure of the next day's lesson plan for students. Through this work, a lesson structure based on inquiry and student perspective was adopted and implemented. Based on student, parent, and staff feedback, teachers were able to address this challenging topic and facilitate student discussion and critical analysis of the events in a thoughtful and appropriate manner. Administrators also sent a message to all staff to offer guidance and support for handling questions from students. One of Northwestern's social studies courses, Contemporary Issues, is grounded in the critical analysis and healthy discourse of newsworthy events within our country and around the world. Northwestern has also supported and worked with our students in providing new ways to learn about social movements and the political landscape. In addition to our student-led Social Justice Club, which has worked collaboratively with our staff Social Justice Committee, students are also in the process of organizing a Common Grounds Club. This club will provide a safe place for all Northwestern students to engage in respectful political discourse, learn about different political perspectives, and continue to grow in respect for diverse thinking and with empathy toward one another.

## **PART VI - STRATEGY FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS**

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The success we experience at Northwestern can be attributed to our commitment to developing positive relationships with our students and families. The trust and partnership that we have developed with our school community has been critical to our success during the pandemic. As our school building was closed due to COVID-related concerns, our Highlander spirit and connection to one another remained our top priority.

Our students experienced a sense of loss and trauma unlike any other in their educational career. As a high school trained in the RULER approach, we recognize that emotions matter and have a direct impact on our attention, memory and learning, decision making, relationship quality, physical and mental health, and everyday effectiveness. Our path to success, therefore, is to provide support and counseling for our students in order to help them recognize and regulate their emotions and feel connected to our school despite the physical separation.

Our high school's House structure allows for a more individualized approach in establishing a positive rapport and working relationship with our students and families. Students work collaboratively with a team consisting of an administrator, school counselor, and administrative assistant in each House throughout their four year career. This structure provides us with an opportunity to get to know our families and each student on a personal level.

Northwestern administrators were passionate about preserving our school connectedness and spirit throughout the pandemic. During distance learning, the administrative team made over 100 socially distanced home visits to deliver lawn signs to students celebrating a birthday or to meet with students who were struggling to engage in school.

Within the first few days of transitioning to this model, administrators created a Student Performance Report Form which allowed teachers to share feedback about individual student academic performance, as well as any social and emotional concerns. Administrators reviewed the submissions, implemented an action plan, and monitored progress to ensure student success.

In order to problem solve and develop a plan to support our students in reaching their potential, administrators, students, parents, and teachers collaborated virtually, utilizing all available technological resources. As a result, no students were allowed to "fall through the cracks," as we maintained our 100% graduation rate during the 2019-20 school year.

Recognizing a need for a flexible, specialized approach, some special education students who were struggling to reach their goals in the distance learning model returned to school in person. Students who fell behind found support in Northwestern's after-school program and summer school for credit recovery.

Due to these efforts, Northwestern Regional High School has been able to maintain a daily attendance rate above 95% and consistent student engagement during our distance, hybrid, and full in-person learning models. This level of success is attributed to the meaningful relationships that we have continually fostered with our students and parents as active partners in this work.