



Monadnock Community Connections School
Choice and Voice

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The Monadnock Community Connections School (MC²) is the primary outcome of an intensive visioning process that brought together diverse members of the school and community to plan for the Monadnock Regional School District, a collaborative district comprised of eight semi-rural and rural southwestern New Hampshire towns, in the 21st Century. Over 160 people participated in the meeting, which was facilitated by personnel from Antioch New England Graduate School. Attendees broke into smaller groups and brainstormed their conceptions of education in the ensuing century.

The participants in this process identified the following as desirable characteristics for a quality education:

- lower student-teacher ratio
- smaller schools
- personalization that provides an individualized education for every student
- education beyond the walls of the school building, including job shadowing and apprenticeships enhanced connections between the school and community

Monadnock Community Connections School incorporates the critical attributes of learning identified by the Monadnock community, drawing its design from the findings of research on learning as presented in How People Learn by the National Research Council. The school is focusing on the four tenets of an effective learning environment: a school needs to be learner centered, knowledge centered, assessment centered, and community centered.

Guided by a “one student at a time” philosophy where each student works collaboratively with a teacher advisor to establish her or his educational plan, the program is built around engaging students in real world experiences through community-based projects and internships, connecting students with outside mentor-experts, and building skills and knowledge to support real work projects. Self-directed graduation projects empower students to explore an area of interest in depth, promoting independent and lifelong learning, building confidence in their abilities as learners, and developing substantive knowledge and proficiency in critical skills.

The educational programs are structured around advisory teams of between 10 to 12 students led by teacher advisors. Advisors are certified teachers who serve as generalists as well as specialists in their work with the students. Learning teams are established for each student and include the student, the advisor, and parents, who are expected to be active partners in the student’s education (a requirement to which the parents agree during the application process).

In addition to the community- and mentor-based projects, internships and advisory-team work, students will participate in “treks,” engaging in experiences that immerse them in diverse cultural, linguistic, outdoor, natural science, social, and work environments. Students may also choose to take advantage of college courses to supplement and enhance their learning.

"As size goes up, school and district-level student achievement go down. This is not a scientific law but a predictable relationship consistently evident in data in six states," report Craig Howley and Robert Bickel in a recent American School Board Journal article titled "The Influence of Scale". MC² is designed for a maximum enrollment of 100 students; acceptance is based on an application process which include essays from the student and his/her parents, a three day visit to the school, and an interview process.

Designed for students who want to learn in a different way and/or learn something different than what the traditional larger district high school offers, we opened with 27 ninth grade students in August, 2002. While the plan is to add 25 students per year until an enrollment of 100 is attained, we have experienced enrollment fluctuations that are typical of fledgling small school. We currently have 38 students, ranging in age from 14 to 18. Nearly one half of our student population comes from outside the Monadnock Regional School District, from three nearby school districts. These students are tuitioned in under a federal school choice grant. We are exploring the development of a reciprocal agreement with the Keene School District.

Family involvement is a cornerstone of the MC² program. Parents are valued as the individuals who know their children best and are integrally involved in the creation and monitoring of student learning plans, the assessment of student progress and achievement, and the development of the culture and community of the MC² learning environment. Beginning with their initial essay for their child's application, parents are asked to bring their expertise to the process of helping their child reach his or her potential.

The school is founded on the belief that by engaging community in the challenges and rewards of educating youth, we guarantee each child is known well, increase safety for all, ensure personalization, and build community cohesiveness through the connections developed in the process. We further believe that by engaging youth in the challenges and rewards of community, they will meet rigorous educational standards, develop deep understandings of the elements of community, appreciate the power of diversity, and become independent lifelong learners who are committed to civic engagement.

Monadnock Community Connections School is developing significant partnerships with institutions and individuals that are eager to support the vision and mission of our educational program. Antioch New England College is wholeheartedly embracing the school as an integral member of its educational community, pledging building space and human resources to the school. Peter Eppig, Chairperson of Antioch's Department of Education, states "Monadnock Community Connections School, in our view, represents a significant evolutionary step in public high school education. Antioch New England is tremendously excited to be a partner in this initiative, and looks forward to exploring the many opportunities this relationship offers for collaborative enterprise."

As Jim Craiglow, President of Antioch New England, so articulately phrased it, "There are many things to be supported. THIS needs to be passionately supported."