

SELECT A CITY ▾

CRANE WATCH

St. Louis Crane Watch: An interactive map of St. Louis projects >

YOUR ACCOUNT

deb.cottin@northsideco... ▾

INDUSTRIES & TOPICS



NEWS

LISTS & AWARDS

PEOPLE & COMPANIES

EVENTS

MORE...



FOR THE EXCLUSIVE USE OF
DEB.COTTIN@NORTHSIDECOMMUNITYSCHOOL.ORG

From the St. Louis Business Journal:

<https://www.bizjournals.com/stlouis/news/2019/02/01/john-grote-on-north-side-community-schools.html>

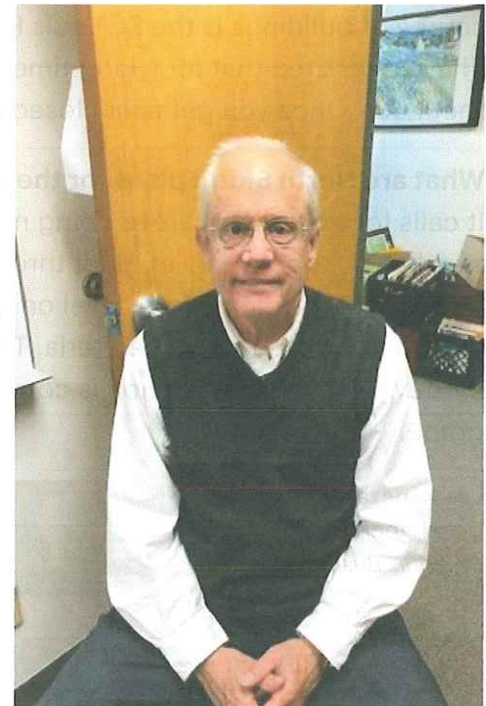
John Grote on North Side Community School's expansion plan and beyond

Feb 1, 2019, 5:00am CST

Subscriber-Only Article Preview | For full site access: [Subscribe Now](#)

Look up charter schools in St. Louis, and you'll find articles about underperformance, scandals and closures. One bright spot, however, is North Side Community School. The small elementary charter received perfect scores for three of the last four years on Missouri's Annual Performance Report, and it holds a reputation as one of St. Louis' best public charter schools. It expanded with a new middle school in October 2018, and now offers sixth grade and plans to add a seventh and eighth grade in the next two school years.

Executive Director [John Grote](#) began North Side with a simple mission — to improve lackluster public education in north St. Louis. A lifelong educator, Grote has a Ph.D. in education from Washington University and has taught at the middle school, high school and college levels. He and Founding Principal [Stella Erondu](#) teamed up with Grote's friend [Ross Woolsey III](#) to open North Side in 2009. Ten years later, Grote has announced he will retire at the end of the 2018-19 school year. In an interview with the *Business Journal*, he talked about how the school has fared and its future plans. The conversation has been edited for length and clarity.



CALEB BENTRUP

John Grote of North Side Community School

Why did you decide to focus North Side on elementary school students? There was some debate about that issue when we got started. We concluded after talking about it that if they didn't get a good start in elementary school, it's very, very difficult to catch them up later. Get them right at the

beginning, get them off to a good start, and that would increase their chances of being successful in middle school and in high school.

North Side has gotten perfect state performance ratings for three of the last four years. What's the secret to its success? A clear mission, a limited mission, an intense focus on academics — particularly language development and math — has been very important. Second thing is high standards for student behavior, both general behavior and academic behavior. We expect students to do what they're supposed to do, and we're pretty strict in enforcing our rules and regulations, and getting students to work up to those expectations. I think it's also been important that we try to engage parents in the process ... we expect them to support what we do, and reinforce what we're trying to do at school, and be a positive participant in the education of their children. And we stay in close contact with parents, and expect them to help us out when we need help, with academic behavior or general behavior of students. Those are really the three most important things.

What prompted the addition of the middle school? We had people graduating at the end of fifth grade and we had to figure out where to send them. And we were doing alright — we sent them to other charter schools, and some went in the county — but there was always that concern that we didn't have enough good options, or we had some good options, but our parents really preferred that the kids stay with us longer. So we added the middle school.

Why not locate the middle school near the student population on the north side? An opportunity for a building site at the Third Baptist Church in the Grand Center area came available, so we grabbed it. One of the big problems for charter schools is to find a facility, and they're not easy to find. The best source of buildings is the St. Louis Public Schools, but they're not turning them over to charters. They've resisted that for a long time. When they close buildings they don't sell them; they don't lease them out. Once you get past closed St. Louis public schools, there aren't a lot of available facilities.

What are North Side's plans for the future? We did a strategic plan last year, and we're in the first year. It calls for doing what we're doing now at the middle school; expanding the middle school. It's going to take two more years to get it through the eighth grade. Also in the expansion plan is to add some capacity at the elementary level on the current campus. It will be a small addition of four classrooms and an expansion of the cafeteria. That's about a \$1.7 million project, and we're going to try to raise money. When this expansion is completed, we'll have about 690 students from pre-K through eighth grade.

Lea Konczal
Data Reporter
St. Louis Business Journal

