

Maine Charter School Commission

November 8, 2016 Business Meeting Minutes Accepted with Correction on Page 16 (Council instead of Coalition) by Commission Vote on December 8, 2016

The Maine Charter School Commission held a regular Business Meeting at the **Burton M. Cross Office Building**, Room #103B, on **Tuesday, November 8, 2016**.

1. Call to Order and Declare a Quorum

The meeting was called to order by Commission Chair, Laurie Pendleton at 9:36 a.m. and a quorum was declared.

Commission Members present were: Laurie Pendleton, Chair; Dr. Mike Wilhelm, Vice Chair; John Bird; Nichi Farnham; Jana Lapoint; and Shelley Reed.

Also present were Jim Rier, Bob Kautz, Gina Post and Amy Allen.

Members of the public present included Judith Jones, MACS; Roger Brainerd, MACS; Grace Hilmer, MeANS (Maine Academy for Natural Sciences); Emanuel Pariser, MeANS; Lisa Sandy, MeANS and Good Will-Hinckley; Michelle Theriault, MeANS; Ken Coville, President of Good Will-Hinckley; Jean Walker, Cornville Regional Charter School; Tonya Arnold, MeANS; Carrie Branson, Harpswell Coastal Academy; Vicki Wallack, Maine School Management Association; Michele LaForge, Baxter Academy for Technology & Sciences (9:52am); Rob Moody, MeANS (10:17am); and Rich Abramson (10:45am).

Students from MeANS who attended were Leanna Laws, Kayleb Shaw, Alex Karter, and Travis Wood.

2. Members of the Public Are Asked to Sign In

Laurie Pendleton reminded those present to sign-in if they had not already done so.

3. To Consider Action Relative to Additions or Adjustments to the Agenda

Bob Kautz commented that there was a revised agenda in Commission members' folders and asked Amy Allen to highlight the adjustments.

Amy Allen indicated that the following items were added to the agenda – an update on the new building and education program at Harpswell Coastal Academy; governing board changes at both Snow Pond Arts Academy and ACADIA Academy; an update on the Blue Ribbon Commission; and an update on the Charter School Council.

Gina Post shared that the copy in folders was the correct one and that the website had been updated to reflect the changes.

4. To Take Action Relative to Accepting as Printed the Minutes of the October 4, 2016 Business Meeting

Moved by John Bird; seconded by Shelley Reed and voted unanimously by those present to accept the October 4, 2016 Business Meeting Minutes as written.

5. OLD BUSINESS

5a. Update on Strategic Planning Sub-Committees:

Bob Kautz indicated that the various sub-committees had not had an opportunity to meet. He hopes that after the renewal process is complete that sub-committees can once again begin meeting as necessary.

5b. To Consider and Approve the Charter Commission Return of Funds

Bob Kautz shared that the Commission would be distributing refunds to schools totaling approximately \$428,000. Schools receiving the refund will be those that have been in existence in the first four years of charter school history. Those schools include Baxter, Cornville, Fiddlehead, Harpswell, MeANS, Maine Connections Academy, and Maine Virtual Academy. He shared that with the input of both Dr. Mike Wilhelm and Jim Rier the decision was made to calculate the refund based on the amount each school reported as funds received in addition to funds received from the state as indicated in the schools' annual audits. That method appeared to be the most accurate, transparent and fair calculation in determining the amount of the refund each school would receive. Schools will be receiving the following amounts – Baxter (\$113,361), Cornville (\$65,279), Fiddlehead (\$36,547), Harpswell (\$63,259), MeANS (\$51,820), Maine Connections (\$84,544) and Maine Virtual (\$13,664).

Shelley Reed asked if a motion was needed to approve the refund as stated by Bob Kautz. Bob indicated that a motion would be required and reminded Commission members that the amount was calculated according to yearly tuition.

Laurie Pendleton asked if there was a process in which schools could question why the amount they were receiving was different from amounts other schools were receiving and Bob Kautz stated that each school would have the right to ask the question but that it would be up to the Commission whether or not they wanted to hear the objection to the amount. Laurie then asked if the percentage being refunded is the same for each school. Bob explained that it depends on each year – those that have been in it the longest versus the growth of the student population. Schools that have held their charter the longest were receiving funding directly from the districts that their students were coming from and the percentage received then was different then when the funding began coming directly from the state.

Moved by Shelley Reed; seconded by John Bird and voted unanimously by those present to approve the refund based on the amount received by each school as reported in their annual audits..

Bob Kautz reminded the group that there had been previous discussion regarding the percentage that the Maine Charter Commission would retain for operating purposes for subsequent years. The recommendation for the 2017/2018 school year is to reduce the percentage from 3% to 2.25%.

Laurie Pendleton asked if the policy is to reduce the percentage each year. Bob Kautz explained that it would be looked at and discussed yearly but that the percentage would only change if it was justified at the time based on the needs of the Commission.

Minutes from previous meetings were reviewed to determine whether or not the amount for the 2017/2018 had already been voted on and approved. It was determined that the topic was only discussed but that an actual percentage had not been voted on and approved by the full Commission. Shelley Reed made a motion to lower the percentage retained by the Maine Charter School Commission for operating costs for fiscal year 2017/2018 to 2.25%.

Moved by Shelley Reed; seconded by Dr. Mike Wilhelm and voted unanimously by those present.

Laurie Pendleton asked when each school could expect to receive the refund. Bob Kautz shared that Commission staff would be talking with Elaine Babb from the Department of Education to determine the process with the expectation that schools would receive their refund as soon as possible.

5c. Update on Harpswell Coastal Academy's New Building and Educational Program

Carrie Branson from Harpswell Coastal Academy shared that work is well underway on the new facility for the Division 2 and 3 space at Brunswick Landing and they are hoping to have the temporary occupancy permit in place by the middle of the following week with the formal occupancy permit in place soon thereafter. While the work is being completed, students are continuing to use spaces throughout the Brunswick Landing including SMCC, the YMCA and a room in the MTI Building. The school has just finished up the first quarter and both students and staff are eager to get into the new space.

Laurie Pendleton commented that at the Maine School Management Association Fall Conference that Apple had shared some interesting work that Harpswell had done. Carrie Branson explained that this was an oral history project that can be found at harpswellstories.org.

No action necessary.

6. NEW BUSINESS

6a. To Accept Notification of Wayfinder Academy Application Withdrawal

Laurie Pendleton asked if a motion was needed to accept the letter of withdrawal. Bob Kautz stated that the Business Meeting minutes would reflect that Wayfinder Academy's application had been formally withdrawn and that the withdrawal letter was presented at the Business Meeting.

No action necessary.

6b. To Consider and Accept Changes to the Snow Pond Arts Academy's Governing Board

Laurie Pendleton shared the changes that had recently taken place with the Snow Pond Arts Academy Governing Board. Those changes included Mike Willey's resignation and appointments of Joe Mattos and Debra Levenseller.

Bob Kautz explained that the Commission needed to accept acknowledgment of receipt of the changes, as the Snow Pond Arts Academy's charter contract states that changes to the Governing Board require notification to the Commission. Earlier charters require notification and acceptance of Governing Board changes, but in this case only notification is required.

The minutes will reflect that the Commission accepted acknowledgment of the notification of changes to the Governing Board at Snow Pond Arts Academy.

6c. To Consider and Approve Koren Coughlin as Interim Principal at Snow Pond Arts Academy

Gina Post recommended that this agenda item be tabled pending receipt of information that has been requested from Snow Pond Arts Academy. In Snow Pond's original application the school had an Executive Director and Department Heads. Because it didn't have a Principal as part of the original structure, appointing an Interim Principal would be a structural change. A change in structure requires that a ME Amendment for Change in Leadership Structure must be completed. Gina showed those in attendance where the form (as well as other forms related to changes to a charter

contract) can be found on the Maine Charter School Commission website. She indicated that the form has been sent to Snow Pond Arts Academy but prior to the start of the Business Meeting had not been received.

Jana Lapoint indicated that other schools have lost staff and haven't had to provide this detailed information. Gina Post explained that the additional information is being asked for because of the structural change to the schools leadership and that a structural change means that an organizational chart will look different and that a change such as this could have budgetary implications. The form is required so that the Commission has a true picture of the impact of the change before making a vote whether to approve or not.

John Bird explained that tabling the agenda item pending receipt of additional information won't, in any way, prevent the school from operating.

Bob Kautz shared that Ms. Coughlin has a Master's in Business Administration and a Master's in Education and a number of years teaching so it's not a case of her qualifications. It's a case of receiving all of the necessary information for the Commission to have when it's time to make a decision.

A motion was presented to table the approval of Koren Coughlin as Interim Principal at Snow Pond Arts Academy pending receipt of additional information.

Moved by Jana Lapoint; seconded by John Bird and voted unanimously by those present.

6d. To Consider and Accept Changes to ACADIA Academy's Governing Board

Laurie Pendleton shared the changes that had recently taken place with the ACADIA Academy Governing Board. Those changes included Pamela Morin's resignation and appointment of Joel Charpentier.

Joel Charpentier has a student who is enrolled at ACADIA Academy. Laurie Pendleton asked if there was a certain percentage of students who could be children of Board Members, Founders, Staff, etc. or if that was only a stipulation as part of an initial lottery. Jana Lapoint indicated that it is 10% of the student population. Bob Kautz shared that the student was a part of the student population prior to Mr. Charpentier joining the Board so the student was accepted for reasons other than being a child of a Board member.

Bob Kautz explained that the ACADIA Academy charter was written like that of Snow Pond Arts Academy's charter so only an acknowledgment of notification of changes to the Governing Board is needed.

The minutes will reflect that the Commission accepted acknowledgment of the notification of changes to the Governing Board at ACADIA Academy.

6e. To Consider and Approve the Renewal Application for Cornville Regional Charter School

Shelley Reed indicated that there are a number of letters that have been received in support of renewing Cornville Regional Charter Schools charter. She asked if those present had a copy of those. Gina Post shared that they weren't distributed as part of the materials but were available for anyone that might want a copy.

Shelley stated that, as one of Maine's first charter schools, that Cornville Regional Charter School's growth, as well as the growth of the Charter Commission, should be commended and indicated that with the renewal discussion of not only Cornville, but also MeANS, that we've hit a historical point in the growth of the charter school movement in Maine. As Review Team Chair, Shelley discussed the Renewal Recommendation Report that was written and submitted by the Cornville Regional Charter School Review Team. She shared that on June 30, 2016 the Maine Charter School Commission, acting in accord with Chapter 3: Procedures for Charter School Renewal, issued to Cornville Regional Charter School a

performance report of the school's performance during its first four years of its initial charter and gave the school the opportunity to respond regarding factual inaccuracies with the report. Also, at that time, the school was issued Renewal Guidance to begin the renewal process. A Site Visit and a Public Hearing, as part of the Renewal Process, were conducted at the school and Shelley shared that students at the school, community members and staff all spoke in favor of the renewal during the Public Hearing.

She stated that Cornville Regional Charter School is requesting two new additions to their existing program that will begin in the 2017/2018 school year. Those additions are a Pre-K Program and a high school program. The recommendation for those additional programs will be voted on at the December 6, 2016 Maine Charter School Commission Business Meeting.

Shelley continued that the review team feels that Cornville has fulfilled its charter contract and that the aggressive academic standards that they have set for themselves have consistently been met or partially met throughout the four year period. The Review Team was asked to answer the following question – *“Do you believe that the applicant has achieved the standards and targets stated in the charter contract, is organizationally and fiscally viable, and has been faithful to the terms of the contract and applicable laws?”* Shelley felt that the Review Teams' answers to that question should be read out loud so that the comments would be reflected in the record. The comments are as follows:

- ✓ Over the four year period CRCS has demonstrated competent and energized school leadership, Governing Board members and staff who have collected and analyzed data, made adjustments and solved emerging issues while maintaining faithfulness to the terms of the contract with Maine Charter School Commission and to all applicable laws.
- ✓ As noted earlier, the Board, administration and staff have been committed and adaptive. They have shown the ability to solve problems as they emerge and move the school forward.
- ✓ The results of four years on the Performance Measures shows a charter school that meets the targets, or in the case of growth and proficiency, comes within percentage points of its aggressive targets.
- ✓ CRCS teachers have participated in many conferences and professional development activities over the past 4 years, either presenting, coaching, or hosting other schools to learn from their proficiency-based and mass customized learning approach.
- ✓ During the course of 4 years, CRCS has maintained stable financials and fiscal sustainability. Financials are reviewed regularly by the board and an annual audit has been conducted for each fiscal year.
- ✓ CRCS is organizationally and fiscally viable as evidenced by their submission of monthly budget reports and end of the year monitoring reports.
- ✓ The school has impacted children in positive ways such as allowing them to feel accepted and supported, excited about learning, and able to have ownership of their learning.
- ✓ With independent self-directed respectful learners throughout the school, CRCS has proven that a rural school with 96% per pupil funds can achieve the goals required for a public charter school and more.

Shelley then shared that the recommendation of the Review Team states “we would like to move forward to renew the charter contract granted to Cornville Regional Charter School on July 31, 2012 for 5 years with the renewal being subject to changes in the monitoring plan and performance framework to be agreed upon by the parties prior to the effective date of the renewed charter.”

Laurie Pendleton shared that the Public Hearing was the first time she had visited Cornville and was extremely impressed with what is happening at the school and that it's a great example of “education doesn't have to be the same old same old” to which John Bird enthusiastically agreed.

Jana Lapoint commented how impressed she was with the children and how appropriate they were during the Public Hearing. She shared that they applauded when others spoke and that they sat attentively for a long period of time.

Bob Kautz shared that a lot of credit goes to the leadership for the employees they are hiring and that Jean Walker, as Board Chair, deserved a great deal of credit for the successes that the school has achieved. He indicated that Jean has been there from the very beginning and has assisted the school through trials, tribulations, joys and celebrations and thanked her publically for all of her fine work.

Moved by Shelley Reed; seconded by Dr. Mike Wilhelm and voted unanimously by those present to renew the charter contract granted to Cornville Regional Charter School on July 31, 2012 for 5 years with the renewal being subject to changes in the monitoring plan and performance framework to be agreed upon by the parties prior to the effective date of the renewed charter.

6f. To Consider and Approve the Renewal Application for Maine Academy of Natural Science

John Bird commented that there “must be something in the air” because both MeANS and Cornville are only a few miles apart from each other geographically yet both experiencing so much success. He echoed much of what Shelley Reed had shared about Cornville Regional Charter School.

He stated that MeANS is proposing a new program that will begin in the 2017/2018 school year. The recommendation for this additional programs will be voted on at the December 6, 2016 Maine Charter School Commission Business Meeting.

John continued that the number of people in the audience is a clear indication of the support that MeANS receives from staff, students and the community. He shared that it’s been a privilege to watch the school grow and commended the support that Good Will-Hinckley has given to MeANS over the years.

He shared that in the areas of proficiency and growth MeANS has had items to improve on but that progress has consistently been made and it is going in the right direction. The Review Team was asked to answer the following question – *“Do you believe that the applicant has achieved the standards and targets stated in the charter contract, is organizationally and fiscally viable, and has been faithful to the terms of the contract and applicable laws?”* John felt that the Review Team’s answers to that question should be read out loud so that the comments would be reflected in the record. The comments are as follows:

- ✓ MeANS continues to fulfill its mission in serving a non-traditional student population in need of support while focusing on themes of agriculture, forestry, and sustainability. The school offers project-based experiences with hands-on learning and each student has his/her own learning plan. Both MeANS families and community representatives have consistently spoken positively of the program’s value over the years. The strengthened relationship with the Kennebec Valley Community College, which includes the availability of concurrent enrollment courses and dual enrollment courses, provides a great opportunity for MeANS students. MeANS met the academic targets of the state-and school-developed assessments in several areas in its first four years.
- ✓ MeANS is working on a three-year financial plan to be financially independent from Good Will-Hinckley (GWH) in operating the school. In the renewal application it was mentioned that beginning in the fall of 2016 the President/Director of Development for GWH will work closely with the MeANS Board of Directors and Academy faculty on the implementation of a comprehensive and ongoing fundraising and development campaign with twin goals of increasing financial independence and expanding resources for instructional activities. There is a solid working relationship between Good Will-Hinckley and MeANS staff and board leadership.
- ✓ The MeANS administration and faculty are acting on strengthening programs, procedures and practices to improve the organizational culture, effectiveness and morale. The plan to gradually diminish the director of curriculum’s role at MeANS is on target. The governing board functions effectively – e.g., regular meetings, and functioning standing committees. The school’s board member profile has strengthened over the years and now adds up to an impressively varied skill set.

John then stated that the recommendation of the Review Team states “we would like to move forward to renew the charter contract granted to Maine Academy of Natural Science on July 31, 2012 for 5 years with the renewal being subject to changes in the monitoring plan and performance framework to be agreed upon by the parties prior to the effective date of the renewed charter.”

Nichi Farnham stated that there is an edit that needs to be made on Page 2 of the Renewal Recommendation Report. It states “K-8 program” and MeANS doesn’t serve that age group. Gina Post indicated that she will make the change to the report so it accurately reflects the population served.

Laurie Pendleton shared that she was impressed with the students and staff at MeANS at their Public Hearing. Shelley Reed stated that the school is doing amazing work and Jana Lapoint indicated that they have a really great school.

Moved John Bird; seconded by Jana Lapoint and voted unanimously by those present to renew the charter contract granted to Maine Academy of Natural Science on July 31, 2012 for 5 years with the renewal being subject to changes in the monitoring plan and performance framework to be agreed upon by the parties prior to the effective date of the renewed charter.

Laurie Pendleton pointed out the terminology of the motion “subject to changes in the monitoring plan and performance framework to be agreed upon by the parties prior to the effective date of the renewed charter.” She shared that the Charter Commission is going to discuss and consider what the monitoring plan looks like for renewed schools taking into consideration that perhaps the Commission does not need to be on-site every year. That although the members enjoy physically seeing what’s going on in the schools, they can appreciate that it’s disruptive. Laurie also indicated that the Commission will also look at the performance framework to insure that the Commission is reporting on items that are important to the public as well as to the Commission and the goal is to have all of that accomplished by the renewal of the contract in June 2017.

Bob Kautz commented that the Governing Board at MeANS is led by Gordon Donaldson and that, as exemplified by Cornville’s Board, is a working Board. He shared that both Dr. Donaldson and other Board members meet regularly with staff to develop procedures, protocols, and handbooks and that they work closely with Rob Moody and Tonya Arnold and other faculty to memorialize what the expectations are for MeANS so that as personnel changes take place and time moves on there is a core and a heart to keep the school’s mission, practices, and care for kids very much in mind and wanted that to be stated in the record.

Shelley Reed commented on how hard both schools have worked. She said that the blood, sweat and tears that have gone into each school could never be measured and that a culture is being created that says “we want to be here, we want to learn and engage in what we’re doing”.

Laurie Pendleton addressed the students that were in attendance from MeANS and told them that speaking in favor of the school at the Public Hearing really made a difference. She shared with them that hearing from the students is important to the Commission – they expect to hear from staff and parents – but hearing firsthand what the experience is like from a students’ perspective is really helpful to the Commission when making decisions regarding the school.

Jana Lapoint shared that one of the things that has impressed her the most about the students at MeANS is that they are totally honest with Commission members, that the students hold back nothing and aren’t afraid to say what’s good at the school and what’s not so good. She stated that that is true of staff as well.

The Commission took a quick break to allow pictures to be taken with staff from each of the renewed charter schools.

After the break, Jana Lapoint stated that when you go into Cornville you see children that actually understand what they’re learning and what they have to do.

Bob Kautz referenced the idea of “character education” when discussing MeANS and Cornville. He stated that the respect that students have for one another is evident and that problems when they occur are resolved in a healthy way that allows things to move forward. He shared that this is a common characteristic in all of Maine’s public charter schools – kids helping other kids, kids being understanding of other kids, staff helping kids being understanding of staff, administration, etc.

Laurie Pendleton shared that in her experience with charter schools that happens a lot because there is a sense of ownership – “it’s our school”. She said that parents feel that way, students feel that way and staff feels that way.

Jana Lapoint referenced Baxtitution at Baxter Academy. She stated that when things went wrong or somebody acted out, it was students who would say to each other “you don’t do that at Baxter”. She shared a story about a second grader at Cornville who was running around and acting out and how an eighth grader took his arms and put them around the younger student and very gently and caringly calmed the student down. She indicated that it was evident that that action was real, certainly not contrived.

Bob Kautz commented about the concept of restorative justice in the school and that the students really understand what that means.

Bob shared with the Commission members that they should have a real sense of pride and accomplishment for the roles that each of them have played in the renewals of Maine’s first public charter schools.

Shelley Reed thanked Judith Jones and Roger Brainerd from MACS for their contribution to bringing public charter schools to fruition in Maine. She was reminded at the NACSA conference of how grateful she is for the laws that are in place in our state stating that they give a real basic foundation of how to make successful schools and successful boards. She stated that all members have been on a wonderful learning path and that it’s an exciting time to be at a point where two schools are being renewed.

6g. To Accept FY17 Budget vs. Actual – November 1 Report

Dr. Mike Wilhelm commented that at the next Business Meeting he’d like to have a discussion about the money that has been aside for technology. Bob Kautz shared that Gina Post is going to be looking at a few different software programs that were introduced at the NACSA conference and would have more information to share at the next meeting.

Laurie Pendleton asked where the Analyst position stood at this point. Bob Kautz shared that we’ve been in touch with the four approved staffing agencies and at this point only a few resumes have been forwarded. He stated that some of the feedback being received is that candidates are looking for a great deal more money than what we have budgeted for the position. He further shared that he hopes to have somebody in place shortly after the first of the year.

Laurie asked if a motion was needed to accept the budget report. Bob Kautz stated that it would be recommended to have a motion so there’s documentation that the Commission has reviewed the budget on a monthly basis.

Moved John Bird; seconded by Jana Lapoint and voted unanimously by those present to accept the FY17 Budget vs. Actual November 1 Report.

7. REPORTS

7a. Chair Report – Laurie Pendleton

Laurie Pendleton thanked everyone for participating in the Board Chair Workshop that was held after the Business Meeting on October 4, 2016. She stated that several next steps were suggested and that both Gordon Donaldson and Sally Mackenzie have been instrumental in reviewing those next steps and making suggestions for moving forward. One thought is to have virtual meetings because of the distance that some folks have to travel to meet in Augusta. Another is for the Commission to host a workshop for Heads of Schools to come together and the thought is to schedule that for some time in February. Looking ahead at future meetings, the thought is to have a certain number scheduled and having Board Chairs meet in the morning and then everyone come together in the afternoon on those same dates.

Dr. Mike Wilhelm commented that it's critically important that the Board Chairs and Heads of School continue the conversation that was started at the first meeting and that the Commission should probably be the facilitator for those conversations but that the meetings should be their meeting, not the Commission's.

John Bird agreed that attending the first meeting was imperative as it gave Commission members an opportunity to hear the issues but questioned whether the entire Commission needed to be present at future meetings.

Laurie Pendleton suggested that participation in future meetings might be agenda driven.

Laurie shared that a common thread that came out of the meeting was a concern about special education and the possible consequences of a high needs special education student coming in the charter school and the overall support of special education students in our schools. It was suggested that a working subcommittee be formed who will look at special education as a whole and discuss what might be done in the future in regards to the law and to look at funding as well as how the schools might collaborate together when it comes to special education needs.

John Bird shared that he saw firsthand at the NACSA conference that special education is a nationwide issue that comes out in many different ways.

Bob Kautz shared that the idea of a working subcommittee is a good one but that it's the responsibility of the schools to get together – that the Commission can certainly encourage them to do so – but that the schools themselves have to take some ownership. He stated that it should not be the Commission's responsibility to arrange the meetings and send out agendas, etc. and that if the schools are responsible for the meetings they'll have a greater sense of ownership.

Laurie Pendleton indicated that another topic that was discussed at the meeting was funding, particularly for transportation. Gina Post shared with the Board Chairs that public charter schools, by law, are not eligible to participate in the purchasing of school buses. Laurie shared that MACS will be sharing information about funding opportunities and sharing costs. Suggestions will be reported to the Commission's finance subcommittee for feedback. Bob Kautz reminded the Commission that the finance subcommittee will be busy dealing with the budget and that, again, the schools need to take responsibility for collaborating and coming up with their own ways of cost sharing. He shared that we can encourage them to collaborate but if they own it there's more likelihood that work will get done and suggested that MACS play a more prominent role in those discussions.

Judith Jones commented that the Maine Ocean School, Maine's newest magnet school, per legislation is allowed to float bonds. She questioned why a magnet school can do that but a public charter school cannot. She wondered what other schools have been able to do and suggested that Gina Post look into LD1277. Going forward, if it makes sense, this might be something that could be proposed as a change to the law. Bob Kautz indicated that he would look into the wording of the law but reminded everyone that the law is online so easily accessible to anyone who wants to read it.

Laurie Pendleton clarified that the Commission's recommendation to the schools is that they put together a committee to look into funding issues and that they look to the Commission if they need any type of support.

Bob Kautz shared that the Commission has spoken to the schools several times over the years about collaborating on items such as business activities, special education, transportation, etc. but that the collaboration never seems to happen for a variety of reasons – i.e. bank arrangements because a Board member works at a particular bank or different systems are used in each school, and distance. One suggestion is to look at collaborations from a geographical standpoint, or perhaps even by grade levels served.

Laurie Pendleton commented that the discussion really comes back to an understanding of the role of the Commission. The Commission does not write law, the Commission carries out the law as it's written. She indicated that it's important for schools to understand that.

Laurie shared that another topic of discussion at the workshop was Board membership and how to generate more interest in serving on a Governing Board of a public charter school. Questions that need to be answered are "What does it mean to become a board member? How do you become a board member? And how can we get the word out?" She indicated that this project might be a good fit for MACS as they've done these types of workshops in the past.

John Bird commented that this would be a natural fit for MACS and reminded the Commission that they live with the results of both strong and weak boards so anything that can be done to improve the overall quality of board make-up would be a good, proactive thing to do.

Laurie Pendleton shared that "bureaucratic creep" was an issue presented at the Board Chair Workshop. She shared that those present at the workshop indicated that it's very challenging for the schools to be asked to submit information to the Charter Commission that they've already submitted to the DOE. Gina Post is currently monitoring that process and is mindful to not ask school for information that is available elsewhere.

Laurie reported that measuring social and emotional growth was an area of interest and schools were interested in tools that are available to measure this. Many are currently using the NWEA but pulling the data from the NWEA in order to use it and analyze it can be cumbersome, time consuming, and somewhat tricky if the user hasn't been trained properly. There are also some budget constraints that make it a less than desirable tool. The thought is to compile a list, or database, of alternative methods to the NWEA that would be available to all schools.

John Bird stated that if the NWEA is not a good instrument for our schools to be using that perhaps the Commission should be aggressively looking at alternatives and not promoting NWEA quite so much.

Laurie reminded the group that the NWEA is a great tool. It just depends on how it's being used.

Shelley Reed asked if schools are using the NWEA often enough and if they know how to data mine the information that is available to them.

Dr. Mike Wilhelm shared that if the Commission were to recommend alternatives to the NWEA there would be a bit of a vetting process that the alternatives would have to go through before the Commission could put their signature on it. He stated that the Commission may not have the capacity or the interest that sort of project would entail. He referenced Bob Kautz's earlier comment about is it the role of the Commission or do schools have the responsibility of doing the research for themselves.

John Bird indicated that he agreed with Dr. Mike Wilhelm's comments but that the Commission does have a vested interest in the tool and the data collection because of the requirement that schools set benchmarks and measure themselves compared to those benchmarks.

Bob Kautz shared that the Commission needs to think about their ability to compare charter schools to each other within the state. He stated that if schools are all using different assessments it will be impossible to compare them because

different instruments will give different results depending on the questions being ask. He reminded the Commission that they had encouraged NWEA, or something that was a bona fide standardized assessment, so there would be a steady comparison on a yearly basis. He shared that the Commission is constantly setting baselines when it comes to assessment and at some point a solid decision needs to be made.

Shelley Reed shared that this is a pivotal moment with ESSA being introduced. Schools are going to have to go beyond academic measures and measure other areas such as social, emotional, cultural, etc. She shared that organizations like the American School Council Association are already looking at those measures, so there is some useful data out there that the Commission could tap into. She stated that as more and more of Maine's public charter schools come up for renewal there will be more of a need to have some common language and a common way to be measuring. The Panorama Survey that was given to parents was a common measurement. In regards to ESSA, we'll need to begin collecting data regarding homeless, military connected and foster care students as this is information that will not have to be reported on.

Dr. Mike Wilhelm asked if there was already a source out there and available. He shared that looking into that possibility would be great first step to explore before reinventing the wheel.

Bob Kautz asked if any of the charter schools present at the meeting wanted to make any comments regarding assessments and how their school uses the data. Michele LaForge from Baxter Academy shared that they use the NWEA data that's collected for placement, for renewing placement, and as a tool for conversing with parents. She questioned where the Commission heard that schools aren't using their NWEA data and indicated that it's not the perfect test but it does have advantages around commonality. She shared that it's a great tool when talking with parents of potential students as its data that can be compared to that of public schools that their children might be transferring from. Tonya Arnold shared that MeANS, of course, administers all of the assessments that are required by the state but in terms of comparison for a local assessment, the flexibility of designing performance measures that match the population that a school is serving is really helpful.

Bob Kautz shared that the Commission would be able to sponsor workshops that would provide training on gathering, collecting and using the data. There is money in the budget designated for training. That money can't pay for just anything but can cover items related to oversight of the charter contract and performances measures.

Laurie Pendleton shared that the Commission will be looking at schools that are in renewal and fine tuning their performance measures for the next charter renewal. She indicated that there is no intention of messing with current performance measures that are in place for each school but rebuilding them at the time of renewal to make sure that they are measuring what's important.

Shelley Reed commented that the amount of time that had been spent discussing the topic of assessment shows that it's an item that needs to be visited.

Laurie Pendleton asked if the Commission requires that a school use the NWEA or if it's strongly recommended that they use it. Bob Kautz shared that it's strongly recommended but neither Maine Connections or Fiddlehead use it.

Gina Post shared that the idea of changing performance measures at renewal is great. She stated that there are schools that are constantly changing their measures so they are establishing baseline after baseline without really settling on any one thing as a point of reference.

Bob Kautz shared that now is a good time to take a look back on the Charter Commission's first renewal process to determine what worked well, what could work better and what needs to be changed for the next round of renewals which will be Fiddlehead, Harpswell and Baxter next year. He stated that it would be helpful to gather as much

information on the renewal process from NACSA to use as a reference point when making changes to the process – much like was done with the initial application process.

Laurie Pendleton stated that the Commission will work on the idea of helping schools know that there are ways to measure more than just academic data. She also said that the scheduling of workshops for schools that are in renewal to work on performance measures is a task she is willing to take on. She stated that if the Commission has to live with the performance measures they should make sure they like them. She will be working closely with MACS on many of the follow up items from the Board Chair Workshop and will get notes out to everybody as soon as possible.

Laurie then reported on the Maine School Management Association fall conference session that the Charter Commission and MACS participated in. She stated that there were approximately ten attendees and what appeared to be a great deal of interest in district-sponsored charter schools. She shared that Dr. Mike Wilhelm gave a brief overview of the renewal process and that Roger Brainerd from MACS spoke about the district-sponsored chartering process.

Rich Abramson indicated that there had been some discussion regarding charter schools being eligible for associate membership status on Maine's School Board Association and had been told that the topic was on the agenda for representative assembly and wondered if there had been any discussion with the Charter Commission. Bob Kautz shared that it appeared it wasn't even on the agenda so no discussion at this time.

7b. Vice Chair Report – Dr. Mike Wilhelm

Dr. Mike Wilhelm reported on recent Blue Ribbon Commission meetings and stated that two meetings had taken place in October – one on October 17 and the other on October 31. He shared that at the October 17 meeting Jim Rier provided an overview of the EPS formula and explained the pieces of the formula and the relationship between the state's financial support and the local requirement. He shared that the Blue Ribbon Commission had been looking at the findings of the Picus Report which recommended that the state spend additional money for teacher training, Pre-K, class size reductions, teacher mentors, specialists for struggling students and increased spending for disadvantaged students. The October 31 meeting focused on a presentation explaining New York State's BOCES system. BOCES stands for Board of Cooperative Educational Services. Dr. Wilhelm shared that New York's education system is structured with the State Board of Regents overseeing a Commissioner of Education who oversees both the Department of Education and BOCES and that BOCES consists of 37 regional boards which provide services to their school district members. These services are in the areas of vocational and special education service, information, administrative back office, career and technical education, online learning, substitute and itinerant teachers, professional development, student assessment and online instructional support. Each BOCES is a collaborative that has been formed to meet the specific needs of its member districts. New York's school districts' needs vary depending on their geography, so the BOCES reflect a flexible approach to district support. Each BOCES must pass an effectiveness test and must be accountable to its members and 3.7% of state aid is relegated to BOCES. Similar models exist in 43 other states and is being presented as a possible option for Maine. He commented that it's interesting that the topic of charter schools working more collaboratively amongst each other when it comes to services was discussed earlier in the meeting and stated that the charter schools could work very much like BOCES does. An interesting note about BOCES is that when they were created, New York State created incentives to use the services – unlike Maine's approach to consolidation which provided no incentives. New York believed that if they wanted people to work together they needed to give them a reason to do so. Dr. Wilhelm also shared that there was a presentation regarding ESSA and the changes being discussed. The most significant are the elimination of AYP and the 100% proficiency requirement, no state prescription for state accountability systems, weights and differentiation, the use of non-academic indicators, and the absence of federal prescriptions of school improvement strategies.

Jim Rier shared that there's now enough information and data available to begin tweaking the EPS formula.

Dr. Mike Wilhelm stated that the Blue Ribbon Commission had initially been tasked with “think outside the box and if you had whatever you wanted what would it look like?” He shared that the group is starting to find some common ground.

Shelley Reed shared her interest that we’re back at ground zero with the fundamental structure that allows education to happen.

Jim Rier shared that PICUS was responsible for looking at fairness in equity which was beginning to be impacted by additional local money that some districts can provide while others can’t. He stated that in 2016, Maine schools spent \$250,000,000 over EPS and that didn’t happen equitably across the state. This is something that really needs to be looked into and examined more carefully.

7c. Executive Director – Bob Kautz

Bob Kautz pointed out that it didn’t find its way onto the agenda, but that he was asked to participate on the ESSA Advisory Committee and indicated that the first meeting was last week. He shared that there wasn’t a lot of progress made at the meeting and deferred to Vicki Wallack from the Maine School Management Association for her input.

Vicki stated that the first meeting was informational and intended to bring all the attendees up to speed with ESSA and the requirements going forward.

Bob Kautz shared that the next meeting is scheduled for November 30th and another one in January. He shared that ESSA is saying you need to spend more time in making judgments about progress being made not only academic-wise but also in the non-academic areas as well. The Advisory Committee will be giving their advice regarding the proposed changes and what information might be included with the application that must be submitted. The states’ application can be submitted in either March or July and the hope is to have the process complete and the application submitted by the March deadline. There’s a 60 to 90 day review period so getting the application in before July insures that schools will have the information they need for their applications for federal funding prior to the start of the following school year.

Jana Lapoint asked how many people were at the meeting.

Bob shared that there are 20-22 on the Advisory Council itself and there were 15-20 additional people who attended. The meeting was originally scheduled to be in Room #103 but had to be moved. It was held in Room #541 which wasn’t nearly large enough to hold all of the attendees so space was tight.

Jana then asked if Bob learned anything from that meeting that he didn’t already know about ESSA. She shared that ESSA has been out all over the state and that they’ve attended at least two of the State Board of Education meetings so she’s unclear what more could have been shared that those in attendance didn’t already know.

Bob indicated that there were a number of people there and there wasn’t an assumption that everybody in attendance knew the same things about ESSA. He shared that it’s a large committee which is comprised of teachers, administrators, parents, superintendents, and school board members so the purpose was to go through the basics and have some discussion. He stated that due to the cramped space the discussions were difficult to have but the discussions were good ones.

Jana asked what the goal was for the upcoming meeting on November 30.

Vicki Wallack shared that at the first meeting the goal was to start on the application itself and the group looked at a handful of applications from other states to confirm what Maine would like to use in its application. Those looked at were Rhode Island, Illinois and Delaware.

Laurie Pendleton asked Bob Kautz if there was an update on the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee meeting that had been scheduled for October 4th but postponed. Bob shared that no new date had been shared for the meeting and it will be interesting to see what happens next. With the election being today, the next Legislature will begin sometime early to mid-December and the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee as it exists now would cease to exist until a new one is appointed. The hope still remains that Jim Rier will be appointed sooner rather than later.

Bob Kautz then reported on the Charter School Council who will be meeting directly following the Business Meeting.

7d. Program Manager – Gina Post

Gina Post shared that the Commission has some 90 day visits coming up. The visit to Snow Pond Arts Academy will be from 9:30am to 12:30pm on December 5th and the visit to ACADIA will be from 9:30am to 12:30pm on December 8th. She shared that the visit structure will be the same as the other 90 day visits that were done following the matrix that the Commission approved back in January of this year. She also shared that a follow-up meeting with Maine Virtual has been scheduled for December 16th from 12:30pm to 3:30pm which is the result of concerns with its end of year report which was shared with the Commission during its last Business Meeting.

7e. NACSA Conference

Laurie Pendleton asked if anyone who attended the recent NACSA Conference wanted to give an update about what they learned.

Shelley Reed asked if Commission members had a copy of her notes. Gina Post shared that her notes weren't distributed as we were waiting for others so we could provide them all at once but they are available and we'll send them to anyone who would like a copy of them. Shelley went on to share that NACSA is producing some really great documents. One in particular is the document on ESSA that talks about the transition and describes some of the items for the Commission to consider. She shared that it's important that the Charter Commission have a seat at the table when discussing ESSA because Maine's public charter schools are included and we need a say in the language. She shared that Amanda Fenton from NACSA will be doing blogs and updates on ESSA which Bob Kautz can take with him and use at the Advisory Council meetings. Shelley stated that the opening performance by Utopia Academy was amazing and exciting because Maine now has Snow Pond Arts Academy which will be producing musicians and spoken word artists so having a performing arts school in our portfolio is great. Shelley also shared that an important topic of discussion that she took away from the meeting was that of diversity – do we have diversity on our authorizing board? What's the diversity in teachers, what's the diversity in the state of Maine? She stated that Maine may not have large, diverse populations but that there are populations and we need to be thinking about bringing them into our schools.

Shelley shared that another item she took away from the NACSA conference was that of differentiated oversight and indicated that differentiated oversight doesn't mean that the oversight is less, it's just not as rigorous and she shared a quote that she took away from a session on annual reports – "It's not hard to make decisions when you know what your values are." She also commented on the size of the staffs in other states compared to what we have here in Maine and indicated that the staff here may be small but every member is very dedicated.

Gina Post shared that in addition to the year-end reports that the Commission does for each school it would be nice to have a report that showcases the different performance indicators in each of our schools and how those compare locally, at a state level and across the country. There were really nice reports presented at the NACSA conference and the

Commission should be able to produce a report that showcases how Maine's public charter schools are performing overall.

Gina also shared that she'll be looking at a few different web-based software programs that may be able to assist with document tracking and compliance as well as board information. Those programs are FluidReview and Epicenter. She has demos scheduled with each and will share more information with the Commission after she's had a chance to participate in those demos.

Bob Kautz indicated that as the Commission grows there will be a greater need for a program that can collect, store and organize data in a fashion that makes it easily accessible and that there is money in the budget for purchasing a program that will assist in this.

Bob also shared that the connections that are made at the NACSA conference are invaluable and encouraged any of the Commission members who have not had a chance to attend to really think about doing so.

John Bird commented that this was the first NACSA conference that he attended and as someone who's very familiar with professional conferences that this one was really well done and that the passion that the attendees had for public education was extremely impressive to him.

Jana Lapoint stated that she was recently reminded of the negativity that exists regarding charter schools and is frustrated with the amount of misinformation that is still being presented. She shared that the NACSA conference is a reminder that there are great people, with great credentials, working on behalf of the charter school movement.

Jana also shared her concern that Maine still has only nine public charter schools and wonders why we don't have ten charter schools. Why aren't there more applications being received? Is it because the process is too difficult, time consuming and costly or is it something else entirely? She indicated that it's something that needs to be looked at because we have a cap of ten schools and after five years we still only have nine. There must be reasons why.

Dr. Mike Wilhelm commented that an item he took away from the conference was that of diversity. He indicated that Maine is one of the least diverse states but thinks the Commission should ask if there is diversity in Maine's public charter schools and is the Commission, as public charter school authorizers, a diverse group of individuals. A second point he wanted to make was regarding virtual schools. He shared that using simple metrics, virtual schools aren't performing any better or any worse than brick and mortar schools and feels that Maine is in a great position to monitor our virtual schools as we only have two compared to other states that have hundreds that they manage. He stated that the jury is still out on the effectiveness of virtual schools and that Maine's Charter Commission needs to remain cognizant of that fact.

Shelley Reed shared that a primary researcher of virtual schools approached her at the NACSA conference to say that Maine has one of the most solid virtual applications, follow-up and monitoring processes in the country.

8. REPORTS

8a. Turn in Expense Account Vouchers at the End of the Meeting

Laurie Pendleton reminded Commission members to turn in the Expense Account Vouchers that are in their packets at the end of the meeting.

8b. Upcoming Commission Meetings – December 6, January 3, and February 7

Laurie Pendleton reminded those in attendance of the next three upcoming Business Meeting dates.

9. PUBLIC COMMENT

Roger Brainerd from MACS spoke regarding the Charter School ~~Coalition~~ Council meeting that is to be held directly following the Business Meeting. He shared that attendees should feel free to get their lunch and bring it back to the meeting as it would be a working lunch. He shared that the meeting was scheduled as a result of the Board Chair Workshop that had been held last month. He stated that everyone is welcome and encouraged to attend but is mindful that not all will attend each meeting going forward.

Roger also shared information regarding the event that MACS has planned for Thursday, December 1st. It is a luncheon which will be held at the Governor Hill Mansion in Augusta and is for charter school leaders to come together and mix with people from across the state who are interested in the charter school movement. Formal invitations will be sent out soon but wanted to let folks know so they could put the event on their calendars.

Judith Jones from MACS shared that the National Alliance of Public Charter Schools' national charter school conference will be held in Washington DC from June 11 to 14, 2017. She also shared that the fact that we're at this point with the charter school movement in Maine is fantastic and shared that dozens of people have worked for twenty years and deserve a great deal of credit for all the hard work that has gone into the movement over the years – particularly Roger Brainerd and Emanuel Pariser.

10. ADJOURN

Meeting was adjourned at 12:48 p.m.

Moved by Jana Lapoint; seconded by Shelley Reed and voted unanimously by those present to adjourn.