

Maine Charter School Commission Meeting - August 5, 2014

Minutes

The Maine Charter School Commission held a meeting on August 5, 2014, at the Burton Cross Office Building, 111 Sewall Street, Augusta, ME.

I. CALLED TO ORDER:

Vice Chair, Shelley Reed, called the meeting to order at 9:05 a.m.

II. ROLL CALL:

The following members were present: John Bird, Nichi Farnham, Laurie Pendleton, Ande Smith, Michael Wilhelm and Shelley Reed. Jana Lapoint arrived a few minutes later. Bob Kautz, Executive Director, and Deanne Lavalley, Administrative Assistant, were also in attendance.

III. ADJUSTMENTS TO THE AGENDA:

None.

IV. APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

A. Moved by John Bird; seconded by Mike Wilhelm and voted unanimously by those present to accept the July 1, 2014, Minutes as written.

V. OFFICERS' REPORTS:

A. Chair

Bob and I reviewed Application Process with Sarah Forster. Maine International Charter School, Snow Pond Arts Academy, two potential applicants, have withdrawn; four are remaining. Analyze the applications carefully; what stands out; what is weak. Narrative and rubrics to use in review; recognizing the capacity for a full 10 schools this year.

B. Vice Chair

Baxter report writing with Jana and John.

C. Executive Director

Sta-Cap explanation from Elaine Babb - copy provided. Revenue stream from a school subsidy not from a grant or private – does that make a difference in MCSC being “taxed” on this revenue?

Doing some work on Record Retention. Janet Downes, the Temporary Office Assistant, is doing a great job sorting and filing; in two weeks’ time, eight boxes in the basement storage already.

Deanne ordered and we received today the Law Books for 2014-2015.

Laurie and I met with Harpswell and on their report; as well as, the report writing on Baxter and all the other schools.

End-of-year Reports on the Charter Schools cannot be complete by the August 1 deadline; but, by the regular scheduled business meeting in September.

Requirements:

Schools’ on-site visit;

Schools’ end-of-year information as soon as it can be generated after June 30 plus discussion on requiring realistic data from the schools;

Meet as teams for report writing;

Draft report presented to schools for review/potentially factual clarifications from the schools;

Finally, present to the whole Commission for a vote to approve the end-of-year reports.

VI: UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

A. 1. Update on Maine Connections Academy Enrollment Status - due July 31.

Maine Connections Academy

Updates to the Maine Charter School Commission

July 31, 2014

Enrollment Update:

As of July 31, Maine Connections Academy had 522 students in the enrollment pipeline. We have received a total of 301 Intent to Enroll forms. We have received a total of 265 Commitment to Enroll forms. 255 students have had their SAUs notified within the required timeframe (the other 10 are currently in process) and we have received 76 unique ID numbers. We look forward to having access to Infinite Campus so that we can look up student ID numbers and create student ID numbers for students who don’t already have one.

A. 2. Sarah Forster will review the July 31, 2014, response from Amy Volk, Maine Connections Academy, referencing Section 508 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 – a national law that protects qualified individuals from discrimination based on their disability. Technology Accessibility Website Compliance.

B. Discussed:

05-071 Education General Chapter 140 D. Commitment to enroll. Within 14 days of being notified of the right to enroll in a charter school, each student must submit to the charter school a written form committing to enroll in the charter school in the upcoming school year,

signed by the student's parent, guardian or legal guardian. The commitment to enroll form must authorize the resident SAU to release to the charter school the student's unique identifier number in the state's student information system.

C. Update on Harpswell Coastal Academy - Alternative Assessments and Performance Indicators. – June 3, 2014, “Preliminary Approval subject to the Review Team Report on the June 5, 2014, HCA Visit.’ This item deferred to be taken up with item VII E. Update on Harpswell.

VII: NEW BUSINESS:

A. Moved by John Bird; seconded by Laurie Pendleton and unanimously voted to Accept MeANS new Governing Board Members (Tom Edwards, Christie Flint, Cheryl Gwadosky) and change in Officers (Rich Abramson, Chair; Bill Brown, Vice Chair).

B. Update of the Baxter Academy for Technology and Sciences End-of-Year report as presented by the Review Team - Chair Jana Lapoint, John Bird, Ande Smith.

Introduction

Baxter Academy for Technology and Science officially opened their doors with 130 students in 9th and 10th grade coming from 38 Maine towns. Student demographics appear similar to that of many public schools with 17% special needs, 53 % free and reduced lunch and 14 % ELL.

School philosophy promotes innovation where loving to learn and trying new things is part of everyday. It is a school where ethical conduct is expected and exhibited. If behavior is not acceptable, students will say, “We don't do that at Baxter”. Early on in the year, with guidance from faculty, students developed their own handbook called, “Baxtitation.” This Code of Conduct is inclusive of everyone and defines what it means to be a member of the Baxter student body. Students have commented feeling safe and an acceptance of all the differences found within the student body. They feel there are no “groups” and no one is ever judged on what they wear, how they look or what they say.

Day one was a highly successful emersion program, conducted by “Rippleffect”, at Fort Williams Park in Cape Elizabeth. The intension of the program was for students to begin developing trust and respect for each other through specific outdoor activities. The first official day of classes began, literally, with assigned teams assembling all the school furniture. Phase 1 of the facilities 11,000 sq. ft. build out had been completed and approved under much unnecessary public scrutiny. The Certificate of Occupancy was issued on August 26th. Grace under pressure was exhibited by everyone connected to the project. By June of 2014, an additional 4,000 sq. ft. of renovations for Phase 2 was well underway providing additional space for 90 incoming freshmen in the fall. The administration feels the “classroom space promotes interaction across social groups and personal interests, decreasing the appearance of exclusive cliques. These spaces support collaborative and active learning due to size as well as furniture choices.”

Initially, scheduling was not accomplishing its intended mission and a very courageous staff spent two full days in workshops successfully redefining how it could be accomplished. Communication sessions were necessary for both students and parents to accept and understand the changes. Flex Friday has developed into a program that is an integral part of the overall success of the first year. The students exclaim and praise the work done in Flex Friday. Many visitors come to Baxter on Friday's to observe students involved with fascinating group projects.

Communication between faculty, students, administration and parents whether it comes directly to parents or through regular e-mails from the head of school, are on a regular basis. Parents and students alike report teachers and administrators are always available and open to hear from them. Students have been guided along with the responsibilities of open campus privileges and although they don't always leave campus, they understand and respect the rules governing this responsibility. The parents felt the Student Lead Conferences (100 % participation) were more enlightening than they ever expected. Students shared comments that they learned a great deal from the preparation of these meetings. Also to be noted, every incoming student met with a faculty member, administrator or received a home visit before attending Baxter. Outreach to the community has been extensive as exhibited with the financial gifts (\$600,000), in-kind donations and business partnerships established.

The academic staff is highly credentialed with 10 additional staff for the incoming class. There is also a waiting list of students in grades 9 and 10.

C. Update of the Cornville Regional Charter School End-of-Year report as presented by the Review Team - Chair Mike Wilhelm, Jana Lapoint, Shelley Reed.

The Cornville Regional Charter School was the first charter school to open in Maine in the Fall of 2012. It received notice of its charter school status on July 31, 2012 and opened its doors on October 1 of that year with an enrollment of 60 students grades K-6. Cornville is located in central Maine and is adjacent to Skowhegan, Canaan, Solon, East Madison and Athens. Currently the school serves students from 8 neighboring communities including Smithfield, Palmyra, and Norridgewock and has an enrollment of 87 students in grades K-7.

The team consensus is the Cornville Regional Charter School is demonstrating its mission to create a safe, respectful, nurturing and active learning community where every child is given the opportunity to thrive academically, to be accepted, to celebrate accomplishments and to develop a lifetime love of learning.

D. Update of the Fiddlehead School of Arts and Science End-of-Year report as presented by the Review Team – Chair Shelley Reed, Nichi Farnham and Jana Lapoint.

Introduction

Fiddlehead School of Arts and Sciences opened its doors on September 3, 2013 for preschool, kindergarten, first graders and second graders serving 42 students. Located at 25 Shaker Road in Gray, Maine first year students were from eighteen communities.

The Charter School is designed to be based on the Reggio Emilia philosophy with place based, multiple intelligences, art integration and inquiry based learning. Jacinda Cotton-Castro is the Principal.

Throughout its first year students have been observed to be excited, and able to share what they are learning, including Spanish. Student work is evident everywhere on tables, on walls. Displayed with work on shapes were drawings and statements such as, “a triangle is just a triangle until you give it a tiara and long hair and then it becomes a princess.” Students share that at this school kids are kind and gentle.

Parents love the school and what it has done for their children. They have been guided by the administration to see themselves not as fundraisers but integral partners focusing on creating a sense of community.

Teachers in this first year have been working to maintain the Reggio Emilia philosophy and be able to translate what they know and observe about students into proficiency on standards maintaining program integrity while demonstrating a state compatible assessment system. Teachers reported that the most exciting aspect of their work in this first year was the progress of the students, the organic learning under the philosophy. One teacher commented that, “it feels like life” when learning occurs in the building and out into the community.

Fiddlehead identified special education students quickly as school opened necessitating the hiring of additional personnel. The special education director and teacher are working to bridge the regulations of special education with the philosophy of the school, trying different approaches and making adjustments based on the needs of students.

The Governing Board has gone through many firsts, continuing to develop policies, procedures, problem solving, fundraising and at the end of this first year taking part in strategic planning using the Planning Ahead tool. The Board feels that this first year has been a success-“The school is financially on target, you see smiling faces, kids are busy and there is a vibrant teaching staff.”

Process for Monitoring the Public Charter School

The Maine Charter School Commission established a visiting review team accompanied by the MCSC Executive Director, Department of Education Special Education Personnel. Members of the review team were Chair, Shelley Reed, Jana Lapoint and Laurie Pendleton . Laurie was reassigned whereby Nichi Farnham replaced her on the Review Team .The Commission team conducted 2 announced on-site visits during the 2013-2014 school year. The dates of the visits were November 19, 2013 and June 10, 2014. Representatives of the review team were also present for opening day and the 2013 lottery on March 28, 2013 and the 2014 lottery, March 5, 2014 of students.

The review team held interviews with school leadership, staff, students, parents, community and governing board. They also reviewed available data provided by the school. Documents provided by the school are available from the Maine Charter School Commission office. Additional data was collected from the Maine Department of Education website.

Information gathered from documents, interviews and on-site observation was used to determine the extent to which the school has met their contracted performance targets.

E. Update of the Harpswell Coastal Academy End-of-Year report as presented by the Review Team – Chair Laurie Pendleton, John Bird, Shelley Reed.

The Harpswell Coastal Academy (HCA) is one of the three public charter school authorized to begin its first year as a charter school in September 2013. HCA offers personalized project based education, a first of its kind for Mid-Coast Maine students in grades 6-12.

HCA is located on Ash Point Rd. Harpswell, Maine. Its initial enrollment of 57 students in grades 6 and 9 is gathered from 11 different communities from Yarmouth to Woolwich and Wiscasset. 33 students are in 6th grade with 24 in the 9th grade. 13 of the students attending currently have IEP's.

HCA implements a standards-based teaching and learning program - relevant, place-based curriculum that incorporates fieldwork and internships; and deliberate structures for building students' character and holding them accountable. HCA's organizational structure supports students in achieving high standards in a variety of ways – a longer school day, Saturday "intensives," and community mentors for each student. The curriculum and the instructional program are both imbedded in a hands-on learning approach, utilizing an agricultural and natural science oriented environment. Along with the hands-on, individualized instruction, the school emphasizes its Restorative Justice program, designed to help students develop into self-directed learners responsible for their actions

Process for Monitoring the Public Charter School

The Maine Charter School Commission established a visiting review team accompanied by the MCSC Executive Director, and the Department of Education Special Education Personnel. The Commission team conducted two announced on-site visits during the 2013-2014 school year. The dates of the visits were November 8, 2013 and June 5, 2014.

The review team held interviews with school leadership, staff, students, parents and community, and governing board. They also review available data provided by the school. Documents provided by the school are available from the Maine Charter School Commission office. Additional data was collected from the Maine Department of Education website.

Information gathered from documents, interviews, and on-site observation was used to determine the extent to which the school has met their contracted performance targets.

Students

The students interviewed were anxious to share many positive stories about their first year at Harpswell Coastal Academy. They shared their enthusiasm with the hands-on approach to school and appreciated the ability to work at their own pace. Students shared such comments as, "I like hands-on better than textbook", and "I learn better when I can go outside," "We do field work

not field trips.” They also appear to understand their role in their education and realize the importance of taking responsibility for a more self-directed learning style. They were also very positive about the school’s climate and shared thoughts about the Restorative Justice system by explaining that when there is a conflict the students involved learn how to talk it out, sometimes through a resolution circle. They also shared that discipline works better at HCA, “you can talk to the teachers here. At other schools you don’t learn not to do it. Here you learn now not to do it. Here teachers listen for the entire story.”

Teachers

The teachers interviewed also reported a positive culture. The interview team was impressed with their enthusiasm and noted that collaboration among the teachers was strong. The teachers reported receiving a great deal of support from the school leaders with the development of professional growth goals and regular observations and coaching sessions. Student and parent feedback regarding the quality of the teaching staff was very positive. Students shared that their teachers are enthusiastic about their subject matter and have a great deal of respect for their students. One student reported that the teachers at HCA, “love to be with us.”

Administration

The co-directors have learned and grown from this first year and work together as a strong team. The staff provided positive feedback regarding their leadership and decision-making skills. Staff seemed to appreciate the decision-making process.

Board

The board has established routines and procedures that are serving the board and the school well. Minutes and agendas are posted as required and they are building a board with a diverse skill set. Town and Community partnerships

The school has created strong partnerships with the town of Harpswell and therefore, the town is interested in having them in the building long term. The school has established a number of community partnerships that are equally beneficial to both the school and the organization.

F. Role of Authorizer to determine the percentage per-pupil allocation for transportation.

MRS Title 20-A Chapter 112 § 2413 2. A. (3) For transportation expenses, the average per-pupil expense in each school administrative unit of residence must be calculated and an amount equal to a proportion, up to but not more than 100%, of that per-pupil allocation amount must be forwarded to the public charter school attended on the same basis as the per-pupil allocations for operating funds. The percentage of that per-pupil expense must be determined by the authorizer of the public charter school and must be based on the cost of transportation services provided by the public charter school to the student.

Procedure for Maine Charter School Commission
Determination of Transportation
Expenses Payable to a Charter School

Legal Citation: Title 20-A MRSA Section 2413(2)(A)(3)
DOE Rules Ch. 140 Section 3(3)(A)(1)9b)

The Maine Charter School Commission will annually determine and report the amount payable to an MCSC approved charter school by each resident school administrative unit of a student attending a charter school. The amount payable will be a proportion of the average per-pupil transportation expense in that resident school administrative unit, as calculated by the Department of Education pursuant to Title 20-A of the Maine Revised Statutes, Section 2413(2)(A)(3), as compared to the cost of transportation services provided by the charter school to the student for the same year (or closest available year). This determination will apply to resident SAUs of students who reside within and those that reside outside the charter school's catchment area.

This determination will be provided to each charter school as soon as reasonable after the Department of Education has made the necessary data available and the determinations will be reported to the Charter Commission at its next regularly scheduled meeting.

Moved by John Bird; seconded by Mike Wilhelm and voted unanimously to approve the process outlined for determining the percentage per pupil allocation for operating funds by the percentage as a result of comparing charter to residential annually.

VIII: OTHER:

None.

IX. ANNOUNCEMENTS:

- A. Turn in Expense Account Vouchers at the end of the meeting.
- B. Completed Charter School Applications for Opening of School 2015 due August 25, 2014 by 5:00 p.m.

Applications, once screened for "completeness," will be available on or before August 29 for MCSC Members and other Reviewers for reading.

- C. Next regularly scheduled meeting: September 2, 2014, 9:30 a.m.
- D. Upcoming Applicant Schedule:
 - September 29 – October 3, 2014, - Review Team Interview(s).
 - October 14, 2014, Vote on Applicant(s) to move to the In-Person Interview(s) and Public Hearing(s).
 - October 27 – October 31, 2014, In-Person Interview(s) and Public Hearing(s).
 - November 13, 2014, - Vote on Applicant(s) to negotiate a contract.

X. PUBLIC COMMENT:

Amy Linscott, MeCA, As a parent, I appreciate all the work that you do and looking out for the students. It is nice to see that you are taking that much time to make sure the students are considered.

Roger Brainerd, MACS,

A Charter School has asked us about doing Board Governance Training; the Maine Association of Non-profits is talking about partnering with us to do that. Hoping to have Conference in late September – offer some workshops on different needs. We will send out information about that as soon as we can. Looking into No Child Left Behind – Highly Qualified Teacher regulations related to charter schools. Charter school teachers do have to meet those standards; the federal law defers to the state law in terms of certification. You still have to have a bachelor's degree and have to have competency in the subject area you teach, if it is a core course. Will look into it further.

Julie Hannon – Attended a very valuable course presented by Drummond and Woodsum on Maine School Law. Two other charter school members there – one was Michele LaForge. We were welcomed with thirty-seven public school educators there. Not enough on Maine charter school law included in the course, but they are working on it. The lawyers presenting did their very best to slide in the charter school legislation and law into the course. They ran out of time to discuss the funding piece. I am sure the Funding Course that they offer probably covers better. This is a huge question for other people attending who want to have a better understanding of how the reimbursement and the funding works with their schools.

XI. Adjourn

Moved by Jana Lapoint, seconded by Ande Smith and unanimously voted to adjourn at 10:45 a.m.

September 2, 2014, Business Meeting – August 5, 2014, Minutes Approved with Correction of VI. A. 2.