

Maine Charter School Commission

Minutes

Maine Charter School Commission - Thursday, January 30, 2014

I. Call to Order

Chair, Jana Lapoint, called the meeting to order at 9:32 a.m.

II. Roll Call

The following members were present: Jana Lapoint, John Bird, Laurie Pendleton, Shelley Reed, Heidi Sampson, Ande Smith, Mike Wilhelm.

Also present: Bob Kautz, Executive Director, Deanne Lavalley, Administrative Assistant; Roger Brainerd, MACS; Judith Jones, MACS; Vicki Wallack, MSMA,

III. Adjustments to the Agenda

A. Moved by John Bird; seconded by Heidi Sampson and voted unanimously by those present to rearrange the agenda by considering first Section 7. C. Numbers 1 – 4.

IV. Approval of Minutes

A. Moved by John Bird; seconded by Shelley Reed; 1 member, Heidi Sampson, abstained - was excused from this meeting and 6 members voted to approve the January 7, 2014, Business Meeting Minutes as written.

V. Officers' Reports

A. Chair

1. Administrative Support Position
10-12 hours per week. Move to agenda for next meeting.

B. Vice Chair

1. Commented on the Maine Charter School Association - Charter School Day on January 27th in the Hall of Flags. Thanked Roger and Judith for doing the work.

C. Executive Director

1. Reports from Public Charter Schools: Baxter, Cornville.

Cornville has purchased a modular.

Dr. William Crumley, Principal, will not be returning to Cornville next year.

2014-2015 enrollment is in process for all 5 charter schools.

January 15, 2014, MeANS' letter requesting caps by grade levels for newly entering students to Maine Academy of Natural Sciences: Grades 9 & 10: 80% and Grades 11 & 12: 20%. No motion is needed.

VI. Unfinished Business

A. Chapter 3

The intention is to get back on track in February with Shelley, Bob and any other members. The intent is that Chapter 3 will be completed before June 30th.

VII. New Business

A. Proposed additional language to "Payment of Expenses to Maine Charter School Commission Members" dated 7-16-13.

Activities subject to reimbursement (in accordance with MRSA Title 5, Sections 12002A - 12002C).

1. Per Diem

Members of Maine Charter School Commission may be paid an amount equal to the legislative per diem for actual attendance at monthly meetings and special meetings called by the Chair of the Commission or a majority of members of the Commission.

Per diem may be paid for attendance at full-day meetings.

These include:

Monitoring Meetings

- Pre-opening Review
- Ninety-day Review
- End-of-year Review

Application Review Meetings

- Review Team - Interview with Applicant
- MCSC Applicant In-person Interview and Public Hearing.

Moved by Shelley Reed; seconded by Heidi Sampson and unanimously voted by those present to amend the per diem policy (7/16/13) to include the underlined language in this agenda Section 7. A.

B. Material Amendment by Harpswell Coastal Academy to increase their board from 9 to 15 members.

Also, includes resumes for two potential board members: Richard Mayo and Edward J. Harris.

Moved by John Bird and seconded by Heidi Sampson and unanimously voted by those present to approve the Harpswell Coastal Academy Board expansion.

C. Consideration of application approval for further review:

1. Lewiston-Auburn Academy Charter School, Lewiston, Maine

LAACS/LEWISTON/AUBURN ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL
Replication of the Pioneer charter School of science (PCCS)
Established in 2007, Everett, Massachusetts
Recommendation to the Maine Charter School Commission (MCSC)
Report of Subcommittee
Jana Lapoint, (Chair), Shelley Reed & Laurie Pendleton
1/30/14

The sub-committee unanimously recommends LAACS/Lewiston/Auburn Academy Charter School be approved and forwarded to the next step in the application process which is the public interview and hearing. The school is intended to replicate the Pioneer Charter School in Massachusetts. This is reflected throughout their application in the areas of curriculum, student handbook, discipline, mission and vision statements.

A. Education Plan

Presented a clear, focused, compelling mission statement that defines the purpose of the school.
Strong focus on STEM education, balanced with humanities.
Demonstrated knowledge of the diverse cultural background of community it will serve.
Presented a viable plan for curriculum development of the core academic areas consistent with the school's mission, values and education program design.
Interesting concept for "backward design" curriculum development.
Focus on high quality education leading to college.
Requirement of 40 hours of community service to graduate.
Based on Pioneer has developed strong policy on discipline and anti-bullying to provide a safe and welcoming environment for structured learning.
"Character Development" throughout all grades.

Concern

Need to be sure LAACS is fully aware of the differences between Maine and Massachusetts state laws. For example, "Learning Results", "Proficiency Based Diploma, Special Education requirements.

B. Organizational Plan

School calendar extended 190 days, daily schedule 8-5:30 and 3 hours on Saturday.
Two weeks provided for teacher development and half a day during week.
Recruitment plan extensive. Enrollment projections based on face to face contacts in the community, visiting malls, speaking at civic meetings.
Understand staffing needs in ELL and Special Education.
Staffing ratio of 1.13.
Pre-opening plan is detailed and sufficient to bring confidence that tasks have been thought through and there is an understanding of staff and their roles to carry out the plan.
Experience with operating Charter Schools.
Parent involvement is well documented. Have spoken to over 500 parents.
Home visits scheduled for all students.
Concern:

Need to demonstrate how they will involve the greater community such as businesses, colleges, local schools etc. Their need for science labs should require reaching out to industry.

C. Governance

Governing board is representative of education, science field specific, cultural diversity, management and fundraising.

Good understanding of diverse roles needed on board.

Proper documentation has been applied for in order to demonstrate nonprofit and tax exempt status.

Concern

Need to fill two vacant seats possible with legal and financial expertise.

D. Business and Financial Services

Budget priorities are consistent with and support mission and vision of the school.

Fundraising has begun with several letters of financial and donation of I-pads for student promised.

Line of credit of \$250,000 will be secured with backing of Pioneer if needed.

Concern

There is no facility to date but a plan to work with Charter School Development Corporation who would purchase land and build and erect modular building which LAACS would lease on a 5 year basis is in budget.

Budget based on per pupil allotment and donations. Shown to be in black first three years.

There is only a part-time custodian but students are expected to help.

Transportation not nailed down outside catchment area since students will walk within a 2 mile radius but a transportation cost is in budget. Students may be asked to car pool.

Insurance costs in budget but no coverage plans included in document.

Food services not included.

I, Ande Smith, move that the Lewiston-Auburn Academy Charter School be approved for continued review, which includes an in-person interview and a public hearing, allowing the Charter Commission to gather more information for the purpose of making a final decision; seconded by John Bird.

Alphabetical vote of the Commission Members called by Jana Lapoint, Chair:

John Bird: yes; Jana Lapoint: yes; Laurie Pendleton: yes; Shelley Reed: yes;

Heidi Sampson: no; Ande Smith: yes; J. Michael Wilhelm: yes.

Motion to approve carries.

2. Maine Connections Academy, a statewide virtual school

Summary Report of Review Team for MeCA

Team: Ande Smith, John Bird, Michael Wilhelm, Dick Barnes

Executive Summary

The Team reviewed the MeCA application and conducted an interview with MeCA on January 15, 2014. Based upon these and other materials submitted to the team, MeCA is unanimously recommended to proceed to public hearing and further consideration by the Commission.

Notwithstanding this recommendation, the review team has serious concerns regarding the suitability of MeCA to receive a charter and looks forward to the receipt of additional information as part of the public hearing and otherwise.

Summary of Rating Scores

Review Team Score

	Ed Plan	Man/Ops	Gov	Biz/Fin	ESP	Total
Ande	8	8	6	4	6	32
John	7	5	5	5	6	28
Mike	6	6	5	6	6	29
Dick	5	6	6	5	5	<u>27</u>
					AVG	28.5

Observations

1. Education Plan

Generally, the group found that the education plan comprehensively described the model and approach of MeCA's program. Its strengths included:

- Availability of metrics and assessments to provide data-driven decisions
- Flexibility of individual learning plans
- Offers an alternative to traditional schools with the potential benefits to some student (e.g., rural populations, victims of bullying)
- Strong ala-carte course offerings
- Maine-based delivery from local teachers, so long as teachers are from Maine.

Noted weaknesses and concerns include:

- No special ed teacher in year 1 suggesting inadequate capacity and there is no budget contingency to mitigate
- Unclear what level of support can be provided for 504 and ELL students
- Effectiveness of program for ELL students
- Graduation target of 70% seems inappropriately low
- Lack of detail on transition plan to proficiency based diploma
- Vetting, training, and oversight of learning coaches.
- Teacher/student ratio seems low
- Culture and social interaction of students left vaguely stated in proposal and will require strong execution

2. Management and Operations

Generally, the team found that the management and operations of the proposed school were strong. Its strengths included:

- Flexible calendar will be advantageous to some students
- Solid pre-opening and recruiting plan
- Professional development for teachers strongly articulated, supported by local operating centers to facilitate teacher interaction and mutual support
- Model of delivery may attract strong teachers
- Teachers and school leaders are employees of the school, not ESP

Noted weaknesses and concerns include:

- Program will require high-quality teachers with multiple certifications to achieve best results, but budgeted salaries seem ominously low and student/teacher ratio high
- Pre-packed curriculum will limit teacher initiative and professional judgment
- In-person contact with students will be dependent on learning coaches and success will hinge on them. Unclear whether training is adequate.
- While strongly articulated, it is unclear if plan will effectively recruit from state's rural and other target populations
- Board oversight of HR function potentially problematic
- Only one community partner commitment
- Job of the CEO as business manager and principal will be challenging to execute effectively

3. Governance

Generally, the team found that the governance plan of the proposed school is reasonably strong and provides requisite indicia of independence. The review team found that the formation of the Board was catalyzed by the ESP, but based on the current structure, board composition, independent actions (e.g., replacing board members), and its representations and demeanor during interviews, the team was of the common view that the MeCA board is independent and has the capacity to effectively manage the ESP and chart the direction of the school. The RFP's strengths included:

- The board's members deliver business experience, educator/school management, political and state sophistication, and virtual/public school board advocacy experience.
- The board's representation evidences a strong geographic diversity
- The board evidenced strong knowledge of the school's facets during interviews. Of note, the ESP representatives provided virtually no responses to the team's questions regarding the school and its operations.

Noted weaknesses and concerns include:

- A significant portion of day-to-day operations and special ed services are outsourced to the ESP
- Only one member of the board has ever served on a school board, which raises concerns about its acumen in managing a school as a board
- Unclear if it can effectively manage all the contract provisions and will require a strong CEO in support of the board, especially if that person is charged with day-to-day operations as well
- Board will rely on ESP-provided metrics, so raises some concern whether it can independently "pierce the veil" to identify delivery/performance issues before they are reflected in student performance

4. Business and Financial

Generally, the team found that the management and operations of the proposed school were strong. Its strengths included:

- Good budget detail and in general budget appears sound

Noted weaknesses include:

- Accounting and financial control practices are not strongly documented
- Closure plan seemed cursory
- Teacher budget (both FTE and salaries) seems low with inadequate budget for special education
- Management oversight will be key to ensure that ESP value matches expenditures
- Needs criteria for selecting future contracts
- Light detail for learning centers and without leases cannot be closely evaluated
- Unclear if special education budget will cover population
- Unclear if transportation budget will be adequate
- Budget has little contingency for hiring staff or contractors other than ESP

5. ESP

Generally, the team found that the management and operations of the proposed school were strong. Its strengths included:

- ESP appears to have strong track record for operational execution compared to its peers in other states.
- Solid detail in RFP, including disclosure of where it was outperformed by other ESPs.
- Self-generated survey reflects high level of parent satisfaction
- ESP has had no school relationship revoked or not denied renewal
- Governing board has independence and tools to manage and evaluate ESP performance

Noted weaknesses include:

- Despite staffing model, ESP has strong leverage in the contract.
- Performance measures and timelines are not well defined
- Weak detail on relationship between principal and ESP
- Termination provisions seem to provide limited capacity of board to terminate contract

I, Ande Smith, move that Maine Connections Academy be approved for continued review, which includes an in-person interview and a public hearing, allowing the Charter Commission to gather more information for the purpose of making a final decision; seconded by Heidi Sampson and unanimously voted by those present.

3. Maine Virtual Academy, a statewide virtual school

Summary Report of Review Team for Maine Virtual Academy (MeVA)

January 30, 2014

Team: Dick Barnes, John Bird (Chair), Jana Lapoint, Ande Smith

Executive Summary

The Team reviewed the MeVA application and conducted an interview with MeVA on January 13, 2014. Based upon these and other materials submitted to the Team, MeVA is unanimously recommended to proceed to public hearing and further consideration by the Commission. As noted below, however, sub-committee members still have significant concerns that warrant further probing in this next stage of the application process and beyond. What follows is a summary of findings to support this recommendation and frame the concerns. The Team's observations take into consideration the comments of outside consultants who were asked to read the application.

Summary of Rating Scores – Mean Score = 26

	Ed Plan	Man/Ops	Gov	Biz/Fin	ESP	Total
Dick	4	4	3	4	4	19
John	7	5	5	5	5	27
Jana	5	6	7	7	7	32
Ande	7	2	6	6	5	26

Education Plan (scores ranged from 4-7)

In Support (representative comments)

- *Clearly stated mission and vision*
- *Overall the program appears to be able to accomplish its requirements*
- *There is a clear demand for a virtual school option*
- *The curriculum seems well developed.*
- *Metrics and assessment driven*
- *The special education plan seems straightforward*
- *The plan meets requirements for regular synchronous contact between teachers and students*
- *Maine-based core teaching staff is a plus*

Concerns (representative comments)

- *Considerable national data on a 'churning' enrollment from the chosen contractor, sometimes stemming from a complaint of an insufficient support system from teachers*
- *Importance of learning coaches and concern about quality control*
- *Proficiency-based diploma (e.g., compatibility of grading system with this model, implementation put off until 2018)*
- *Special education plan relies on out-of-state manager*
- *ELL challenging and not well addressed*
- *High student-teacher ratios*

Management & Operations Plan (scores ranged from 2-6)

In Support (representative comments)

- *Supervision and evaluation models for staff development in line with best practices in Maine and elsewhere*
- *A strong, nationally recognized professional development plan*
- *A metric-driven bonus system to incentivize teachers*
- *A national contractor with very strong management systems that will support the school in accordance with its model*

Concerns (representative comments)

- *Student recruitment plan weak related to target populations*
- *High student-teacher ratios and compensation levels may negatively impact teacher quality*
- *Learning coaches may not be as effective as needed to personalize the educational delivery system*
- *CEO single point of failure; relies on K12 to some extent for hiring, which calls independence into question*
- *Instructional staff will work from home; effective communication and supervision between teachers and managers may be problematic*
- *Important that staff know the Maine culture and unclear just how Maine-centric the staff will be*

Governance Plan (scores range from 3-7)

In Support (representative comments)

- *Board membership has diversity and strong experience in leadership and management, including business, human resources and online education*
- *Board members' reasons for serving also reflect understanding and passion for the mission*
- *The CEO and CFO positions look strong on paper (employed by board and responsible for overall compliance; also assist board in oversight and supervision of the ESP)*
- *Contract provision that can require termination of staff provides useful tool and lever on K12 execution*

Concerns (representative comments)

- *Board members' knowledge of proposed school operations seems uneven (only the three board officers seem highly involved)*
- *In its proposed educational programs and services contract with K12 it is clear that board has granted nearly full control to the contractor*
- *Director of Instruction is hired by and chiefly reports to the ESP*
- *There is other information in the application that presents a contradictory picture of the CEO's ability to oversee the ESP on behalf of the board*

Business & Financial Services Plan (scores range from 4-7)

In Support (representative comments)

- *The financial plan seems strong*
- *No-interest startup loan provides baseline funding to get on 'rails'.*
- *Assuming all goes as projected, there will be a substantial cash reserve at the end of the third year of operation.*
- *The contractor has strong internal management systems and controls.*
- *CFO and annual budget will give the board a tool to effectively manage the ESP*

Concerns (representative comments)

- *The board, its CEO and CFO, are almost totally reliant on the contractor's management systems for information on student success and financial health*
- *Concerned that more funds not being allocated to ensure that the school will be able to secure the best possible teachers in Maine*
- *Budget detail difficult to ascertain*

Education Service Provider (scores range from 4-7)

In Support (representative comments)

- *The proposed agreement with the ESP is well delineated and transparent.*
- *The nation's largest provider of online educational services for schools K thru 12*
- *The separation of the CEO and CFO reporting directly to the board is essential and the by-laws make this clear.*
- *The budget process will support oversight and the ability to drive performance*

Concerns (representative comments)

- *The governing board offered little insight into its decision to work with K12.*
- *The student achievement data offered as justified for choosing K12 almost devoid of comparisons with other public schools or non-K12 operated charter schools*
- *Some information in the application calls into question the de facto independence of the board from the ESP in controlling all aspects of the operation (e.g., teachers and staff employed by the ESP)*
- *The current budget backup provides some limitation on the comfort from how decisions are made, especially with respect to staffing.*
- *K12 has not demonstrated uniformly standout success as evidenced in the metrics provided in the package*

I, John Bird, move that Maine Virtual Academy be approved for continued review, which includes an in-person interview and a public hearing, allowing the Charter Commission to gather more information for the purpose of making a final decision; seconded by Mike Wilhelm and unanimously voted by those present.

4. Many Hands Montessori School, Windham, Maine

Maine State Charter Commission

1-30-14

Many Hands Montessori Review Team Recommendation

January 7, 2014 the Review Team of Shelley Reed, Chair and Mike Wilhelm and Heidi Sampson met to discuss our individual assessment of the proposal. The Interview with the Governing Board of Many Hands was held on January 15, 2014.

The Review Team's recommendation is that the Many Hands Montessori School application not move forward for further consideration by the Commission for the following reasons:

The Review Team unanimously agrees that we do not have the confidence that the applicant has met the requirements of the RFP to create a successful, sustainable, high-quality public charter school

Details to operationalize and implement the concept need further development

A. Education Plan

The academic program is not aligned with the Maine Learning Results

The applicant did not describe a comprehensive plan to provide a full range of services for special education students

The applicant's budget did not reflect appropriate staffing to carry out special education student needs

B. Organizational Plan

Allocation of staff was not determined to be adequate to meet the tasks outlined in the proposal particularly all the tasks assigned to the Head of School with no administrator or administrative assistant

The applicant did not demonstrate a sound understanding of staffing needs aligned with the mission and vision, the budget and with the school's anticipated enrollment

The Governing Board members' roles as volunteers were intending to fill in tasks to assist in the day-to-day running of the school

C. Governance Plan

The Review Team is not confident that the Governing Board can carry out all the necessary functions to start and sustain a public charter school. Such as, but not limited to, its legal obligations and state and federal compliance.

The applicant did not present a clear plan for the Board to evaluate the success of the school and the school leader

D. Business and Financial Services

The applicant did not present a thorough, realistic and cost-effective transportation plan

The applicant did not present a clear and compelling plan for acquisition and maintenance of a facility that is financially viable. Nor is there a reasonable expectation that a facility can be acquired and ready in time for the school to open.

The Review Team is not confident that the food service has a budget sufficient to support all aspects of a public school food service program.

The Review Team is not confident that budget assumptions, including grant/fundraising assumptions will generate revenues to sustain a public charter school

Overall:

The Review Team determines that there are too many monumental tasks to be accomplished in the time period prior to September of 2014 to be confident that the school will be able to open as planned.

Many Hands Montessori Review

1/30/14

Team: Shelley Reed, Heidi Sampson, Mike Wilhelm

Strengths	Concerns
<p>A. Education Plan Montessori is a well-established approach to education, this school would offer this learning environment to the public. The application showed that the founders working with the philosophy understand child development and establishing a nurturing learning environment Assessment of students and staff is designed as part of the program</p>	<p>A. Education Plan The academic program is not aligned with the Maine Learning Results The applicant did not describe a comprehensive plan to provide a full range of services for special education students The applicant's budget did not reflect appropriate staffing to carry out special education student needs</p>
<p>B. Organizational Plan As part of the Montessori system the staff handbook is very well detailed , it appears that many resources are available through the Montessori organization</p>	<p>B. Organizational Plan Allocation of staff was not determined to be adequate to meet the tasks outlined in the proposal particularly all the tasks assigned to the Head of School with no administrator or administrative assistant The applicant did not demonstrate a sound understanding of staffing needs aligned with the mission and vision, the budget and with the school's anticipated enrollment The Governing Board members' roles all volunteers were intending to fill in tasks to assist in the day to day running of the school</p>
Strengths	Concerns
<p>C. Governance Plan Many Hands has gathered a hands on board with the passion and will to establish a charter school. It is evident that all board members have contributed to the</p>	<p>C. Governance Plan The Review Team is not confident that the Governing Board can carry out all the necessary functions to start and sustain a public charter school such as but not limited to its</p>

<p>application and know what they want to do.</p> <p>D. Business and Financial Plan Financial tasks have been assigned to roles for accountability. Founders believe that many volunteers will be able to be recruited to help with facility development. Food preparation led by a chef with the goal of the school raising much of its food Closure protocol is well thought out</p>	<p>legal obligations, and state and federal compliance</p> <p>The applicant did not present a clear plan for the Board to evaluate the success of the school and the school leader</p> <p>D. Business and Financial Plan The applicant did not present a thorough, realistic and cost-effective transportation plan The applicant did not present a clear and compelling plan for acquisition and maintenance of a facility that is financially viable The Review Team is not confident that budget assumptions, including grant/fundraising assumptions will generate revenues to sustain a public charter school</p>
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Pursuant to Section 6 of Chapter 2 of the Commission's rules, I, Shelley Reed, move that Many Hands Montessori School, Windham, be denied without further Commission review because it does not meet the criteria for continued review for the reasons articulated in the recommendation of the review team as discussed at today's meeting; seconded by Mike Wilhelm and unanimously voted by those present.

VIII. Other

IX. Announcements

- A. Turn in Expense Account Vouchers at the end of the meeting.
- B. Next regularly scheduled meeting: March 3, 2014 9 am - 2 pm
DHHS Building Anthony Avenue, Augusta, Rooms C and D.

X. Public Comment

XI. Adjourn

Moved by John Bird; seconded by Heidi Sampson and voted unanimously by those present to adjourn the meeting at 12:30 p.m.

2/21/14