



Maine Charter School Commission

Monthly Commission Meeting

Published on April 5, 2024 at 9:17 AM EDT

Date and Time

Tuesday April 9, 2024 at 1:00 PM EDT

Location

Room #103, Cross Office Building, 111 Sewall Street, Augusta or [ZOOM](#)

The **Vision** of the Maine Charter School Commission is that *"All of Maine's children will have access to a vibrant ecosystem of diverse schools so that all of them can become happy, healthy and thriving citizens."*

The **Mission** of the Maine Charter School Commission is *"To authorize, monitor and develop unique public charter schools that provide a dynamic, superlative education for every student."*

Reminders:

- This meeting is being recorded via Zoom.
- We ask members of the public to hold comments until public comments are heard.

Any person seeking special accommodation for the public meeting should contact Sue Whipkey at (207)816-2187 or susan.whipkey@maine.gov.

Agenda

	Purpose	Presenter
I. Opening Items		
A. Record Attendance		Susan Whipkey
B. Call the Meeting to Order		Norm Higgins
II. Comments from Commission Chair		
A. Comments	Discuss	Norm Higgins
III. Additions or Adjustments to the Agenda		
A. Additions/Adjustments	Discuss	Norm Higgins
IV. Committee Reports		
A. School Performance Committee	FYI	Tori Kornfield
B. Finance Committee	FYI	Leigh Albert
C. Executive Committee	FYI	Norm Higgins
V. Public Comment*		
A. Public Comment	Discuss	Norm Higgins
VI. Presentations		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>ED279 Discussion with Joe Drago, MCSC Finance Consultant</i> 		
VII. Executive Director/Commission Staff Report		
A. School Updates	Discuss	Lana Ewing
B. Organizational Updates	Discuss	Lana Ewing
C. Media Updates	FYI	Lana Ewing

- *Maine's biggest upset this March hasn't been on the court. It was on a chess board.*
- *Gulf of Maine Research Institute hosts scientists, students for symposium.*
- *Ecology Learning Center Announces Fundraiser for New Clifford Arts & Student Center.*

Purpose Presenter

- *Opinion: We can rebuild our capacity for human connection - Evan Coleman, Maine Academy of Natural Sciences*

D. New Charter School FYI Lana Ewing

VIII. Monthly School Portfolio/Data Report

None

IX. Unfinished Business

A. To Consider the Approval of Fiddlehead School of Arts & Sciences' Request for Funds for Revisioning Project Vote Norm Higgins

X. New Business Requiring Approval and/or Acceptance

A. To Consider the Approval of Ecology Learning Center's Fund Request for Student-Led Arts Initiatives Vote Norm Higgins

B. To Consider Changing the Independent Third Party Evaluation Annual Requirement from Every Year to Twice in 5 Years (Year 2 and Year 4 of a Charter Term) Vote Norm Higgins

XI. New Business Requiring Notification to the Commission (No formal action to be taken by Commission)

A. New Governing Board Members FYI Norm Higgins

- *Ecology Learning Center - Donyse Babin*
- *Ecology Learning Center - Joshua Kerksmar*
- *Ecology Learning Center - Tia Poulin*

B. Board Member Resignations FYI Norm Higgins
None

C. Board Member Term Outs FYI Norm Higgins
None

XII. Next Month's Topics

A. Next Month's Topics FYI Norm Higgins

Purpose Presenter

- *To Consider the Approval of the Commission's FY25 Budget*
- *Ad-Hoc Nominating Committee (Election of Officers)*
- *Executive Session for the Purpose of Annual Executive Director Evaluation (May or June)*

XIII. Announcements

A. Important Dates FYI Norm Higgins

Important Dates:

- *May 14, 2024 - Commission Strategic Planning Workshop (2:30-4:30pm)*

Graduation Ceremonies:

- *Sunday, June 2nd (Maine Arts Academy, Augusta Civic Center)*
- *Friday, June 7th (2:00pm-Maine Virtual Academy, ZOOM)*

B. Next Regular Business Meeting FYI Norm Higgins

May 14, 2024 *(Room #103, Cross Office Building, 111 Sewall Street, Augusta)*
or Zoom

XIV. Closing Items

A. Adjourn Meeting Vote Norm Higgins

* The Charter School Commission does not allow airing of complaints in public meetings regarding Commission and charter school employees or school employment matters, in order to protect employee privacy, to comply with Maine law and pursuant to our contractual relation with the schools. To the extent that the Commission receives complaints and concerns relating to school employees in writing, those concerns will be reviewed and addressed by the Commission and its staff outside of a public meeting. This meeting is not the appropriate forum for such comments. You are free to direct your concerns in writing to the Commission's Executive Director, if you have not done so already.

Coversheet

Organizational Updates

Section: VII. Executive Director/Commission Staff Report
Item: B. Organizational Updates
Purpose: Discuss
Submitted by:
Related Material: 2024 Mid-Year Portfolio Summary.pdf

MAINE

CHARTER SCHOOL COMMISSION

2024 Mid-Year Portfolio Summary

In January, February, and March, Commission staff conducted mid-year meetings with each charter operator. Attendees at the majority of the meetings included the school's board chairperson, a second board member, and the school's leader or leadership team.

In advance of the meeting, schools were provided a mid-year meeting guide, an agenda, and a list of data, aligned with the Performance Framework indicators, to be submitted for review. The data were reviewed by staff and, in addition to the standard agenda, additional questions or topics for discussion were noted.

In the weeks following the meetings, staff developed reports that captured the mid-year data presented prior to and during the meetings. Draft reports were sent to each board chair and school leader for review.

Below, you will find a summary of the topics covered at the meetings. More detailed information can be found in the individual school reports.

HIGH-LEVEL TAKEAWAYS

Strengths

- ELA Through-Year: 5 out of 9 charter schools are outperforming the state average for "at or above expectations"
- Growth data is strong for the schools that administered the NWEA Map: CRCS, MEVA, and ELC
- Family satisfaction across the portfolio is strong
- The majority of schools have improved chronic absenteeism
- All charter high schools are on-track to meet or exceed graduation expectations. The charters range from 88-100% of seniors expected to graduate in 4 years.
- Finance: no material findings on audits. We are awaiting two schools who received extensions.

- Enrollment: There is high re-enrollment and larger enrollment than last year for all schools (except one which has the same enrollment as last year due to space and maintains a waitlist)

Areas of Growth

- Math Through Year: 1 out of 9 schools outperforming state expectations for math
- The majority of schools are not meeting expectations on chronic absenteeism
- Facilities: Enrollment is limited because of square footage

Of Note

- There is limited academic growth data.
- Baxter Academy did not administer the Spring 2023 Through-Year Assessment.
- High cost of out-of-district placements for special education students: ACADIA Academy has 5 placements that are costing \$6,000 per month, per student.
- Per the MDOE, Fiddlehead is in the top 10 schools in the state who serve the highest percentages of students with disabilities.
- Transportation is a barrier to attendance.
- Staff salaries are generally lower than area schools.
- Schools recognize that student behaviors remain challenging in the wake of pandemic traumas and stressors.
- With the requirement of the 3-Year Financial Plan, schools report that the budget process is “easier”.

ACADEMIC

There was a delay in the release of results from the Spring 2023 Through-Year Assessment and the anticipated growth data will not be released.

Schools were asked to report the percentage of students “at or above state expectations” in both ELA and Math. Results show that 5 of the 9 schools are outperforming the average state “at or above expectations” for ELA and 1 of the 9 schools are outperforming the average state “at or above expectations” for math.

Math proficiency results were lower than anticipated and a surprise to school leaders.

3 of the 9 schools administered the NWEA MAP assessment and the percentage of students meeting projected RIT growth meets or exceeds expectations on the Performance Framework. Most subgroups are achieving growth similar to the total student population.

The majority of high schools have administered the Accuplacer assessment and have met or exceeded Performance Framework expectations.

ATTENDANCE

Schools reported current chronic absenteeism rates to indicate trends in year-end reporting. Students are chronically absent if they miss more than 18 days, or 10% of the school year.

Chronic absenteeism varied significantly across the schools. Staff reviewed rates by grade level, campus and school. Schoolwide rates ranged from 6.82% to 38%, which is an improvement over reported chronic absenteeism rates a year ago.

GRADUATION

High schools provided the percentage of current 12th grade students on track to graduate this spring. The calculations do not include students who have dropped out or have left the school. That calculation is done at the close of the school year by the Maine Department of Education.

The percentage of 12th grade students on track to graduate as of mid-year ranged from 88%-100%. Schools are offering opportunities for students to catch up on standards completion or credit recovery, and were hopeful the rate would increase as the year draws to a close.

FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE

Schools provided updates on current financials, FY23 audits, and the development of the SY2024-25 budget. The majority of schools are in the lower to moderate risk categories on the Performance Framework. 7 of the 9 charter schools have received a completed financial audit, which was reviewed and discussed at the mid-year meeting. The two schools without a complete FY23 financial audit have been granted an extension by the MDOE.

Schools commented on the slow process of receiving reimbursements from COVID-related grants, making it difficult to manage cash flow.

No schools reported any compliance issues with lenders or the MDOE.

STUDENT ENROLLMENT AND RECRUITMENT

At the time of the mid-year meetings, schools were in the midst of the enrollment process for SY24-25. Schools report high re-enrollment numbers and a high number of new intent to enroll applications. Early indications are that enrollment is strong and waitlists will be robust.

FACILITIES

Many schools in the portfolio have run out of space in their current facility(ies). There is interest in expansion (i.e., increasing enrollment), but space is a barrier.

SCHOOL CLIMATE

Panorama Climate Surveys were issued to families, students, teachers, and staff in the Spring of 2023. Leadership reviewed the results and created one or more goals for the current school year.

GOVERNANCE

Boards are recruiting members for current or anticipated openings, planning retreats, engaging in strategic planning, and working on policies.

Many boards have long-time members/officers who will term out in the next year or so and are actively engaged in succession planning.

When asked about concerns that the board members have, answers included money, the lack of a strong fundraising plan, applying for and maintaining grants, space, compliance, and staff turnover.

Coversheet

Media Updates

Section: VII. Executive Director/Commission Staff Report

Item: C. Media Updates

Purpose: FYI

Submitted by:

Related Material:

Maine's biggest upset this March hasn't been on the court. It was on a chess board..pdf

Gulf of Maine Research Institute hosts scientists students for symposium - WGME.pdf

ELC Announces Fundraiser for New Clifford Arts & Student Center.pdf

pressherald.com-Opinion We can rebuild our capacity for human connection.pdf

Maine's biggest upset this March hasn't been on the court. It was on a chess board.

pressherald.com/2024/03/19/from-chess-camp-to-state-championships-asylum-seeker-propels-baxter-academy-to-title-in-clubs-1st-year

March 19, 2024



João Vuvu-Nkanu Maviditi, left, and Abdallah Ali ponder their next moves while playing a game of chess in class at Baxter Academy on March 12. The school's chess team won the state championship last weekend for the first time. *Gregory Rec/Staff Photographer*
[Buy Image](#)

In the lobby of Portland's Baxter Academy for Technology and Science, a chess board is on prominent display – for good reason.

Earlier this month, the school's chess team – which didn't even exist a few months ago – won the Maine State Scholastic Chess Championship against 15 of the state's best teams, including Kennebunk High School.

Going into the championship, facing established high school chess teams, Baxter was not expected to win.

The player who clinched the big win for school's six-member team is freshman João Vuvu-Nkanu Maviditi, a teen from Angola who last year was living at the Portland Expo when it served as temporary shelter for asylum seekers.

Related

Portland youth chess club gives asylum seekers a sense of belonging

During the final round on a recent Saturday, Kennebunk High School and Baxter Academy faced off.



Jacob Kaiser, top left, makes a move during a game of chess against Gibson Holloway next to João Vuvu-Nkanu Maviditi, top right, and Abdallah Ali during chess class at Baxter Academy. *Gregory Rec/Staff*

Photographer

[Buy Image](#)

“The last round was pretty intense,” said Baxter team member Kai Whitehead, 16, of Gorham, who had played in earlier rounds. “It was down to the wire.”

Whitehead, who was watching intently, first felt optimistic for his team, but then, he said, the play took a turn.

“I thought it was over when both (of Baxter’s two last players) were losing,” Whitehead said.

Then Maviditi, 16, now of Saco, turned his game around and won.

“I don’t know how, but he came back,” Whitehead said.



Kai Whitehead moves his king while playing a game in chess class at Baxter Academy. *Gregory Rec/Staff Photographer*
[Buy Image](#)

Suddenly Baxter Academy was the new champion – thanks in part to this soft-spoken young man who has lived in the United States for just one year and has told his teachers he wants to breed fish.

Whitehead describes Maviditi's chess skills as "fierce."

Kennebunk High won second place in the tournament. Chess coach David Cimato said for his team that "was a huge accomplishment against some really tough schools, Cheverus, Fryeburg Academy, John Bapst."

For Baxter to grab the championship win "is hugely impressive," Cimato said in an email. "Baxter's team held up extremely well under pressure and in sharp tactical positions. Their patience and calculation in those two end games were the difference."

Baxter's other chess team players are Jacob Kaiser, Abdallah Ali, Gibson Holloway and Sean Glass.

The team's coach is Major Juac, an internationally known chess master who once was one of the "Lost Boys" of Sudan who fled the civil war in their country and undertook long and dangerous treks to safety, spending years in refugee camps and eventually resettling in the

United States.

Juac now lives in Falmouth and is on the faculty at Baxter, where he teaches chess.



Chess teacher and team coach Majur Juac watches the progress of a game during chess class at Baxter Academy. *Gregory Rec/Staff Photographer*
[Buy Image](#)

His team's big win and what led up to it is "extraordinary," said Anna Klein-Christie, the school's executive director.

FROM HOWARD JOHNSON'S TO BAXTER

Last April, the Portland chapter of the international nonprofit The Gift of Chess was offering weekly chess games at the Howard Johnson's in South Portland, teaching the game to children of asylum seekers. The organization said that learning chess would help the newcomers build life skills, adjust to their new environment, and connect with others across divides of language and culture. The new players were encouraged to speak English as they learned to work on their language skills.

Local young people were encouraged to come play with them. Jeff Cawthorne, of Falmouth, brought his sons to play because he saw it as a chance for them to learn "about the world bigger than themselves," he told the Press Herald last year.

Over the summer, Gift of Chess volunteers brought chess to the Portland Expo, where asylum seekers were being temporarily housed. The young people there had few enrichment opportunities or chances to become part of the broader community, said Katie Moore, a leader in the nonprofit's Portland chapter.

The Gift of Chess asked Juac, who was living in New Jersey at the time, to come to Portland to teach the game at the Expo. But Juac needed a place to live.

That's where Laurie Leonard, a retired doctor in Falmouth, came in. Leonard read about the local chapter's efforts to promote chess here, and he reached out to Moore to donate chess sets.



Student Uriel Valenbin, left, plays chess with retired doctor Laurie Leonard, right, last summer at the chess camp held at Portland's Baxter Academy. *Photo courtesy of Katie Moore/Gift of Chess*

Moore thanked him for the chess sets, but said she had a bigger request: Would he consider having Juac live with him for the summer while the chess master taught the game at the Expo?

Leonard thought about it and then said yes. The living arrangement continues today.

At home, Juac coaches Leonard as they play chess. Leonard calls him "a superb teacher," and Juac praises Leonard's chess skills.

“He is very good. He’s 94 and still competitive,” Juac said. For his part, he asks the doctor “medical and scientific questions” and says Leonard is patient and answers all his questions.

AN INVITATION TO PLAY

Klein-Christie, Baxter’s executive director, said she heard about the summertime chess games at the Expo and met Juac when she went there.

“We wanted to provide a safe space for the kids, because we could provide air conditioning and provide food,” she said of the school.

So she invited the Expo’s young chess players to come play at Baxter, where a summer chess camp was created.

During the summer games, Maviditi was getting noticed as a serious, standout chess player, Moore said. She asked Maviditi’s mother if she would allow him to enroll at Baxter. She agreed.

Klein-Christie said she welcomed him and three other students who used to live at the Expo. Maviditi, she said, excels in math and is in an advanced sophomore math class.

The summer chess games went so well, Klein-Christie said, that “as summer was wrapping up, we said wouldn’t it be amazing if we kept this going?”

So they did.

Baxter offered chess play after school, not just for its students but for other young people, including those who attend the downtown Boys and Girls Club.



The Baxter Academy chess team poses after winning the Maine State Scholastic Chess Championship this month. Lying on the floor is their chess teacher, Majur Juac. The team members, from left, are João Vuvu-Nkanu Maviditi, Jacob Kaiser, Abdallah Ali, Gibson Holloway, Sean Glass and Kai Whitehead.

Courtesy of Katie Moore/Gift of Chess

When the games first started, “a few of those kids didn’t know how the pieces moved,” she said. “But Juac soon changed that.”

The school held tournaments in the summer, fall and winter. It’s hosting another next month and inviting in other schools.

In the fall, Baxter also launched a chess class taught by Juac, and 16 academy students signed up right away, Klein-Christie said.

She said the chess students are “really into it” and put their phones down and talk to one another as they play.

With a limited budget, it’s a stretch for a charter school to expand programs, Klein-Christie said.

“But it’s has been a worthwhile investment. Chess is a way of teaching them strategic planning, math skills. And it’s lovely for them to be building community.”

Related Headlines

[Portland youth chess club gives asylum seekers a sense of belonging](#)

Comments are not available on this story.

[UMaine Orono part of high-altitude balloon launch to record solar eclipse](#)

[Portland parents voice concerns about staffing cuts in proposed school budget](#)

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Gulf of Maine Research Institute hosts scientists, students for symposium

by Alison Murtagh, WGME
Mon, March 18th 2024 at 6:48 PM



The Gulf of Maine Research Institute hosted its "Findings from the Field Symposium." (WGME)

PORTLAND (WGME) -- Professional scientists and aspiring ones were all under one roof in Portland Monday.

The Gulf of Maine Research Institute hosted its "Findings from the Field Symposium."

Middle and high school kids from Maine and New Hampshire showed off their science projects to professional scientists from the Gulf of Maine Research Institute and NASA.

The students studied things in their own communities like invasive species, how temperatures affect bee pollination of blueberries and much more.

The kids brought their findings to the pros to use in their own research.

"There are no other science journals for students that are going through this process," Gulf of Maine Research Institute Science Instruction Specialist Catherine Bursk said.

"It's definitely cool that we have input on like public, on like, what people see," Lincoln Akerman School student Colby Swazey said.

"I plan on going into science for my career, so being able to do something outside of school like this is very helpful to get me ready and get feedback on what I can do better," Baxter Academy student Odin Bravo said.

"We're just really grateful to be here. It's a really good opportunity," Lincoln Akerman School student Haylee Knowles said.

A member of NASA's jet propulsion team was also there working with the students.

the Ecology Learning Center

For Immediate Release

March 14, 2024

Media Contact: Lēza Packard, Head of School, Ecology Learning Center
(207) 230-9275 or leza.packard@ecologylearningcenter.org

Ecology Learning Center Announces Fundraiser for New Clifford Arts & Student Center

Located in Unity, new building needs \$150,000 to support a farm-to-cafeteria program, in addition to covering capital and operating expenses

UNITY, Maine – Today, the [Ecology Learning Center](#) — a public charter high school based in Unity, Maine — announced a new fundraising campaign for the Clifford Arts & Student Center, which was gifted to the school in February. The campaign hopes to raise \$150,000 by Sunday, June 30th, supporting a “farm-to-cafeteria” program, in addition to covering capital and operating expenses. Every donation to our capital campaign will be doubled.

Gifted to the school on Valentine’s Day, the Clifford Arts & Student Center spans more than 8,000 square feet, featuring a theater that seats 200 people, ceramics studio with 12 pottery wheels and two kilns, classrooms, and office space. The new funds will allow the building to advance the Ecology Learning Center’s mission of deeply rooting students in Maine’s ecological and cultural landscapes, fostering authentic real-world



Senior class presidents, Ada Dennison (in front, left) and Emma Wallace (back, right), opening the door for the first time with the key.

learning while cultivating compassionate, resilient leaders who can engage in the challenges of today and tomorrow.

The Clifford Arts & Student Center is located at 42 Depot Street in Unity. Interested donors can give money in the following ways:

1. Visit our [website](#); send cash or check to “Ecology Learning Center” (230 Main Street in Unity)
2. Sponsor or attend a [Community Program](#)
3. Donate an auction item and attend our live auction in the theater on Friday, April 26th at 5:30 pm

The Clifford Arts & Student Center hosted a grand re-opening last Sunday, March 10th, with The Al Corey Big Band playing music — showcasing the theme of “Some Enchanted Evening” — and the Ecology Learning Center’s student-chefs serving island fare, inspired by the South Pacific. The building was originally opened in December 2000 by Bert and Coral Clifford.



Junior, Etta Hughes, at one of the two grand pianos in the building.



“From our administrators to teachers and countless students, the Ecology Learning Center is beyond excited to open our new Clifford Arts & Student Center to the public,” said Lēza Packard, Head of School at the Ecology Learning Center. “By promoting real-world learning, the new building will be instrumental in turning the next generation of Maine leaders into a compassionate, resilient force, while also bringing our Unity community even closer together. Of course, fundraising will be key to our success, so we humbly ask for the community’s support as we plan for the future. We are also extremely appreciative of the generosity that we have seen already.”

***To schedule an interview, please contact Lēza Packard,
leza.packard@ecologylearningcenter.org.***

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Editor’s Note:

Click the images above or the links below to access downloadable versions.

<https://s3.amazonaws.com/NMC-Clients/MCSC/2.14.24+Arts+Center+key+open.png>

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About Maine Charter School Commission:

The Maine Charter School Commission (MCSC) authorizes, monitors and develops unique public charter schools across Maine that provide a dynamic, superlative education for every student. Founded in 2011, MCSC aims to improve student education and educational opportunities, provide alternative learning environments and encourage the use of different, high-quality models of teaching. MCSC's vision for the future is to make sure all of Maine's children will have access to a vibrant ecosystem of diverse schools so that all of them can become happy, healthy and thriving citizens. For more information, go to www.maine.gov/csc.

Opinion: We can rebuild our capacity for human connection

pressherald.com/2024/04/02/opinion-we-can-rebuild-our-capacity-for-human-connection

April 2, 2024



For the past decade, I've worked with high school students on finding their voice through storytelling.

Sometimes, this was through memoir, where it took courage to dig back into the past and even more to share stories with our class. Sometimes, storytelling was brainstorming ways in which students could take action and make a change in our community – from raising awareness or funds for a local nonprofit to creating public service announcements that educate families on a topic. But where I saw students find their voice most was in the little discussions and side conversations when we connected the stories, films and field trips to what was going on in their daily lived experiences.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Evan Coleman serves as the director of curriculum and instruction at Maine Academy of Natural Sciences.

During the mass loss of life at the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the protests for justice in the wake of George Floyd's murder, and our ongoing political battles – fact versus fiction and opinion versus science – what I found mattered most in the hour-long Zoom sessions that I conducted with students in California was the ability for us to hold space for each other. When we took time to journal and process the chaos, I found blackened screens turn on and heard students share openly and vulnerably about how they really felt about the state of the world, our country and our community. I witnessed students show an unprecedented level of thoughtfulness, empathy and compassion for the suffering around them – far more than most of the adults in their lives, and mine at the time.

This year, I served as Maine Academy of Natural Science's liaison for The Can We? Project. Started by the Third Thought Initiative, it focuses on revitalizing our democracy through storytelling, dialogue and identity work at the secondary level. Working with administrators, teachers and a cohort of 18 students this year, we have taken on ice-breakers and listened deeply for understanding. And, bit by bit, we have opened the door to connecting our lives and backgrounds to some of the more contentious issues of today: Gun control, abortion, climate change, xenophobia and the future of education.

During our first session, which took place in a greenhouse and yurt on campus, we shared definitions of family and we laughed about little things, like our favorite desserts. We partnered with students and teachers whom we didn't know well and looked at identity maps of where we come from. But perhaps the most pivotal experience came when we partnered up with people we hadn't connected with yet. We listened in silence to a story from a person whom we barely knew, so that we could retell that story to the group. The topics ranged from heartbreak to family dysfunction, taking a step of courage to letting down your guard. In every story, there was a moment of impact – a turning point when something clicked for a person, and trying to recapture this as the storyteller was difficult but powerful. In our debrief afterwards, many students were surprised that we "barely even talked about politics," but found themselves sharing openly with peers whom they had never met before. There is something vital in this realization that, before we can debate or critique, we must listen to understand.

At the Augusta Civic Center, the home of our second retreat, we gathered with 13 other cohorts from schools across the state of Maine and I witnessed this same deep listening, this same openness and willingness to be vulnerable with complete strangers during group discussions on personal freedoms. On the bus ride home, I heard students eagerly sharing about moments where they started to understand why someone might feel differently about abortion than they did, or why the gun control argument might be more nuanced than they had thought.

Not once did I see students eye roll or scoff. I heard no labeling, and the only laughter that arose was good-natured – a way of connecting with strangers instead of isolating them.

The year ahead promises political disappointment, unrest and finger-pointing from both sides of the aisle. As we try to repair our fracturing democracy amid clips of animosity, violence and silencing, it will undoubtedly be painful for all of us.

But what I find myself holding onto as I think about 2024 is returning to our group of 18 students, setting up a circle of chairs in the yurt once more, and sharing, listening, processing and navigating the road ahead.

Another View: As Boeing bosses leave, scrutiny must continue

Opinion: On behalf of Black Bear Nation, a hearty thank you

© 2024

Coversheet

To Consider the Approval of Fiddlehead School of Arts & Sciences' Request for Funds for Revisioning Project

Section: IX. Unfinished Business
Item: A. To Consider the Approval of Fiddlehead School of Arts & Sciences'
Request for Funds for Revisioning Project
Purpose: Vote
Submitted by:
Related Material: FSAS - Fund Request Form - February 2024 (Part 1).pdf
FSAS - Fund Request Form - February 2024 (Part 2).pdf
FSAS - Fund Request Form - February 2024 (Part 3).pdf

Maine Charter School Commission Workshop Proposal Form

The Maine Charter School Commission has set aside funds to provide resources for the charter schools it authorizes to conduct workshops that will assist them to better meet their contractual responsibilities and achieve their performance framework.

<i>Applicant Information</i>	
Name	Board Revisioning – Strategic Planning
Organization	Fiddlehead School of Arts & Sciences
Phone	207-688-3727
Email	jacinda@fiddleheadschoo.org
Signature	
Date	December 23, 2023
How many charter schools could benefit from this workshop?	One

<i>Workshop Purpose</i>	
How will this workshop enhance the performance of charter schools?	<p>Our last Board Retreat was in February 2021, with Carol Wishcamper, who is a trained facilitator for Board Development. Unfortunately, Carol has since retired, however, she has recommended some colleagues we can work with. After interviewing such candidates and reviewing the qualifications of such candidates with the Board of Directors, they have selected a candidate, Joanne D'Arcangelo, and we have included the proposal in our request.</p> <p>In the aftermath of the Pandemic, the Board feels that it is imperative to re-vision our organization. What remains important to us, what do students need now, who are we and what key elements continue to define us? We would love to continue this revisioning work to crystalize our 2024 – 2026 planning goals.</p>

	As always and in Fiddlehead fashion, we will be sharing and working with our talented staff, as well as the families within our community.
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Workshop Provider	
Name/Organization	Joanne D’Arcangelo
Workshop fee	\$12,000 – We are requesting 50% of this fee. \$6,000
Materials fee	\$250
Venue fee	\$0
Total Cost	\$6,250.00
Web site	www.fiddleheadschoo.org
Phone	2076883727
Email	jacinda@fiddleheadschoo.org

Workshop Information	
Workshop Goal	Revisioning, Planning & Development
Workshop Audience	Board of Directors & Executive Director
Workshop Description	Revisioning Workshop/Retreat
Length	4 months
Proposed Date	End of January/early February to begin – completion in June, 2024

Please attach a proposal from the proposed provider. (See attached)

**Proposal to the Fiddlehead School for the Arts and Sciences
Strategic Planning Process
December 12, 2023
JD'A Consulting & Coaching**

Purpose

- To convene stakeholders of the Fiddlehead School of Arts and Sciences to ensure its continued impact and relevance to the communities it serves;
- To ensure an inclusive and reflective process to design a strategic framework to guide the school in its mission work for the next 2-3 years;
- To create space and opportunity for stakeholders, including the Board of Directors, faculty and staff, parents of students, and other community members to contribute to the planning process in a meaningful and collaborative manner;
- To create a strategic framework that will guide the school's work in alignment with student, community, and other stakeholder expectations and aspirations, while allowing the school to pivot and course-correct as opportunities or exigencies emerge in the coming years.

Results

The school and its stakeholders will agree the process:

- ✓ Invited and utilized the participation and contributions of those invested in Fiddlehead's relevance and success as a public charter school;
- ✓ Provided opportunity for stakeholders to engage in meaningful ways that strengthened relationship and collaboration;
- ✓ Created a strategic framework that lends clear and informed direction for the school, while allowing its leadership to respond effectively in the evolving environment and changing community, economy, and educational system.

The following broadly outlines a four-step process over the course of 12-14 weeks to develop a strategic framework that will guide the school for the next 2-3 years.

This outline emerged from our conversation on November 29, and is subject to revision. As we discussed, this will be an iterative process, whereby each step will inform the next – and may result in changes to the process as described, as well as the outcomes we're aiming for, at the conclusion of each step.

As written, the proposal assumes the consultant will be working with a small planning team chosen by the E.D. and Board Chair, who can lend time and judgment to help design a process that meets the leadership's expectations.

Step I

The Board and E.D. invite representatives of the staff/faculty to join in a conversation that will serve two purposes: 1) Provide opportunity for staff and faculty to be engaged and share with the Board insights based on their day-to-day experiences, guided by questions offered in advance of

JD'A Consulting Proposal to Fiddlehead School – December 12, 2023

the session; and 2) To ensure the Board is more fully informed about the lived experience of those directly serving students who have greater clarity of how mission translates to operations. The outcome of this session is greater alignment between Board and staff/faculty on what is happening on the ground – “Where we are now” -- and therefore increases the likelihood both can also reach agreement on “Where we need to go”. *Preparation:* Generating the precise questions to elicit both reporting of what’s happening on the ground, as well as generative conversation to begin “visioning” for the future. [Week 1. 2-hour session]

Step II

The Board convenes to assess the content and feedback (ideas, concerns, proposals, aspirations, etc.) offered by staff/faculty in Step I; and sets parameters for the next step of the process, which will include parents and other community stakeholders. In Step II, the Board and E.D. will 1) Decide what content offered by faculty/staff will be carried forward to next steps; and 2) Develop criteria for assessing the impact and sustainability of the content offered.

The outcome of this session will be agreement among the Board and E.D. on the criteria to be used to rank higher- and lower-priority objectives.

Preparation: Presenting in advance budget and other data re: organizational resources for the period of the strategic framework; Development of workshop agenda and advance support by consultant of key Board members and E.D. regarding workshop tools and process.

[Week 3: 3-4 hour session]

Step III

The purpose of this step is two-fold: 1) Report back in writing to staff/faculty that the Board has reviewed their content from Step I and has further defined criteria for evaluating the *sustainability* and *impact* of those proposals/actions going forward in the planning process. And, 2) using an online survey, invite their feedback on the Board’s draft criteria, and invite a preliminary “ranking” of their proposals/ideas (that will ultimately translate to goals and objectives), using that criteria.

The outcome of Step III is a refined list of proposals/actions that has the input of all internal stakeholders and is ready to bring to Step IV, when parents and other community members will be invited into the process.

Preparation: Drafting the online survey; review and revise if needed materials summarizing information from Steps I-III. Other logistics related to administering online survey.

Caveat: Considerable thought should be given to how the staff and faculty input and feedback should be obtained, and whether this is a process into which *all* staff/faculty or a representative sample are invited to participate. It’s understood that this step of the process could be more labor intensive than expected.

[Week 8: 1-2 hr. session of planning team]

Step IV

This is the “public” and all-inclusive step in the process, when Board members, faculty and staff, parents and others from the community will convene and engage in a process to further develop and refine goals articulated in earlier sessions and refine and rank objectives for each goal. This session will be an in-person sessionⁱ, with opportunity for remote observation. As stated earlier, this would be the final step in an iterative process informed by earlier outcomes; however, it is

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envisioned as a process that could invite participants to take a “gallery walk” in pairs to assess draft goals and objectives that are posted on the wall; ask them to offer revisions or refinements; and in a final step, convene in small groups to rank or prioritize objectives, using the criteria identified earlier by the Board in Step II.

Preparation: Extensive planning to design a large in person/hybrid interactive session; logistics including but not limited to securing and setting up meeting space, development and distribution of materials, tech support for remote observation or participation, etc.

[Week 12: 2.5-3 hour session]

The consultant and planning team will decide what form the “strategic framework” takes, and how many versions are required: e.g., is an internal, more detailed document/dashboard expected to guide the work of internal stakeholders, in addition to an executive summary for external stakeholders?

These and many other questions can and should be asked and answered, and I look forward to the opportunity to do so with you in a future conversation, should I be selected to work with you.

For the services described and the estimated time I have projected with this outline, JD'A Consulting, Inc. proposes a contract fee of \$10,700 - \$12,000. The services provided will include guiding planning sessions; design of the agendas for and facilitation of the stakeholder sessions; and written summaries of the sessions. Required travel will be invoiced at the current government rate of \$.655/mi.

Thank you for this exciting opportunity to work with Fiddlehead School for the Arts and Sciences, as it embarks on this exciting second decade of serving Maine students!

ⁱ This could be a hybrid session with remote participants if FSAS has tech capacity to administer a participatory hybrid meeting

Joanne D’Arcangelo
Portland, Maine

Joanne is a non-profit consultant, facilitator, and leadership coach with over thirty-five years’ experience in Maine’s political and non-profit sectors. Through her current enterprise, [JD'A Consulting & Coaching](#), she provides coaching and mentoring to social justice entrepreneurs and non-profit leaders, as well as customized Board Governance Training to nonprofit 501(C)(3) and (C)(4) organizations.

Since 2006, D’Arcangelo has advised dozens of clients in public policy development and advocacy, as well as donor advising and philanthropic planning, leveraging over two decades in the State House as a staff leader and non-profit advocate. Recent clients have included Maine Historic Preservation Commission, Southern Maine Agency on Aging, Equality Maine, Waterman’s Community Center, Legal Services for the Elderly, Wyoming Civic Engagement Network, York County Shelter Program, Inc., Viles Arboretum, and the John T. Gorman Foundation.

Prior to her consulting business, she served as Chief of Staff for Maine’s House Majority Leaders and the Speaker of the House; V.P. for Public Affairs at Planned Parenthood of Northern New England; Director of Advocacy for Maine Family Planning; Executive Director of the Maine Justice Foundation; and as lobbyist for the Maine Women's Lobby.

D’Arcangelo is the recipient of a number of awards for her work in political action and on behalf of social justice, including induction to the Maine Women’s Hall of Fame in 2020; the Maine Women’s Lobby 40th Anniversary Honoree; Maine Family Planning’s Huber Award, the Maine Women’s Policy Center Leadership Award, Portland YWCA’s Woman of Achievement Award; the Maine Civil Liberties Union’s Roger Baldwin Award; and the Maine Women’s Fund Annual Recognition Award.

Joanne lives in Portland and has an M.A. in English from the University of Maine and B.A. from Fitchburg State University. Joanne is a certified Meyers-Briggs trainer, providing MBTI assessment to individuals, teams, and partnerships; has a certificate in Mediation and training in Executive Coaching from USM’s Professional Development Program; and is certified in Result-Based Facilitation.

She currently serves on the Board of Trustees of Planned Parenthood of Northern New England and on the Advisory Council of the Community Organizing Alliance.

Coversheet

To Consider the Approval of Ecology Learning Center's Fund Request for Student-Led Arts Initiatives

Section: X. New Business Requiring Approval and/or Acceptance
Item: A. To Consider the Approval of Ecology Learning Center's Fund Request for Student-Led Arts Initiatives
Purpose: Vote
Submitted by:
Related Material: ELC Innovation Fund Request Form.pdf

Maine Charter School Commission

Fund Request Form

1. Completed form must be submitted via Epicenter.
2. Form must be submitted **three weeks** prior to the next Business Meeting date to be included on the agenda. Note: Business Meetings are typically held on the 2nd Tuesday of each month.

Name of Requestor	Lēza Packard
Organization/School	Ecology Learning Center
Phone	207-230-9275
Email	Leza.packard@ecologylearningcenter.org
Signature	<i>Lēza Packard</i>
Date	3.27.24
Total Amount Requested	\$10,000

Please explain the proposed use of funds in detail:

The Ecology Learning Center proposes to use innovation grant funds from the Charter Commission for student-led arts initiatives. We will use the funds to pay for curriculum resources, arts materials, and staff time. The overarching goal for these expenditures is to build a strong base for an expanded arts curriculum and maximize our new Clifford Arts & Student Center.

Here are some of the innovative student-led arts initiatives:

- Performing Arts – One of our current students is writing a musical, and has requested to hold auditions this spring and earn course credit in the fall for December performances. We do not currently have staff capacity or expertise to support the student in the planning phase. We need funds now for someone to lay a strong foundation for the upcoming theater program, including create course objectives, determine necessary materials (costumes, scenery), and how to purchase, store and care for these materials for the long-term success of the performing arts program.
- Ceramics Studio – Students are excited to use our newly acquired 12 pottery wheels, 2 kilns, and glaze room! We do not currently have staff capacity or expertise to teach the class. Our visual arts teacher has basic skills with ceramics but would like to take professional development courses to rekindle skills. We would use funds now for the teacher to take courses, and for someone to lay the foundation for the ceramics program.

*The Commission **may** require that the school submit a report after the activity. Staff will let you know at the time of approval when and if a report will be needed. Thanks!*

- Culinary Arts – Students love working in the kitchen with the Chef to prepare school lunch. Many students have requested to work more than just 2 hours in the kitchen on 2 or 3 days throughout the school year. They would like to gain more skills than simply washing, chopping, and grating vegetables. We do not currently have staff capacity or expertise to design and schedule a culinary arts course. We would use funds now for someone to lay the foundation for a culinary arts program.

Our revenue hasn't yet caught up with our expenses to design new arts programs (performing arts, ceramics, culinary arts). By investing in an arts curriculum development consultant / interim director and associated materials, we can wisely plan for the future. This is a strategy to test out our model, and to design sustainable structures and staff positions for the Clifford Arts & Student Center.

How will this proposal enhance the performance of charter schools?

This proposal enhances the performance of our public charter school by diversifying our course offerings (adding theater, ceramics, and culinary arts), and providing specific professional development and organizing structures for the long-term sustainability of each arts course. This proposal is rooted in program design, including identifying performance standards, instructional approaches, differentiation strategies to meet the needs of all learners, and assessment tools. We encourage teachers to partner across disciplines. Therefore, strengthening our arts curriculum will bolster our overall school performance.

Please explain how this relates to your professional development and operation of the school:

This funding request relates to the professional development and operations of the Ecology Learning Center because it is requesting guidance and expertise in the content area that has been weakest in our curriculum to this point – the arts. We have only been able to hire part time arts teachers in three areas (painting/drawing, music, and woodworking), and we have offered no professional development training in the arts. We identify the need for more rigor and professional guidance in arts education at our school. The Clifford Arts & Student Center will only be as effective as the instructors are. Strong curriculum design and program design will result in an overall stronger school.

*The Commission **may** require that the school submit a report after the activity. Staff will let you know at the time of approval when and if a report will be needed. Thanks!*

Fill in as Appropriate:

Proposed Date of Activity	mid-April through mid-August 2024
Duration	4 months, ~ 10 hours per week
Location	Clifford Arts & Student Center, Unity
Number of Participants	4 (3 current arts teachers + 1 new teacher/coach)

Please provide a breakdown of the Total Amount Requested. If you have received a proposal from a provider you **must** attach a copy to this request.

Registration Fee	
Materials Fee – for arts materials recommended by	\$2,000
Venue Fee	
Other – salary for interim arts curriculum coach/consultant/director	\$7,000
Other – professional development workshops for current arts teachers	\$1,000
Total Cost	\$10,000

The Commission **may** require that the school submit a report after the activity. Staff will let you know at the time of approval when and if a report will be needed. Thanks!

Coversheet

New Governing Board Members

Section: XI. New Business Requiring Notification to the Commission (No formal action to be taken by Commission)
Item: A. New Governing Board Members
Purpose: FYI
Submitted by:
Related Material: ELC - New Board Member (Donyse Babin).pdf
ELC - New Board Member (Joshua Kercsmar).pdf
ELC - New Board Member (Tia Poulin).pdf

Public Charter School Governing Board Member Information Sheet

Name of Public Charter School: Ecology Learning Center

Name of Board Member: Donyse H. Babin

Email Address: donyse.babin@ecologylearningcenter.org

Occupation: High School Guidance Counselor

Please respond to the following questions:

1. Why do you wish to serve on the governing board?

I am a lifelong resident of Unity and have been intrigued by the growth of the Ecology Learning Center in my own community. I hope to be able to support the growth of the ELC as it continues to help students reach their greatest potential. As I am nearing retirement, I want to stay involved in education in a meaningful way, as I believe it is the greatest investment I can make.

2. What is your understanding of the educational needs of students in the catchment area?

Many of the students in this demographic need hands-on experiences and opportunities for authentic practical application of their learning. For some, the value of education is not emphasized at home and therefore there needs to be a great deal of scaffolding in order to help them gain confidence as they learn new skills.

3. Please list any previous or present educational involvement; such as board member, budget committee, citizens committees, etc. List school(s) or district(s).

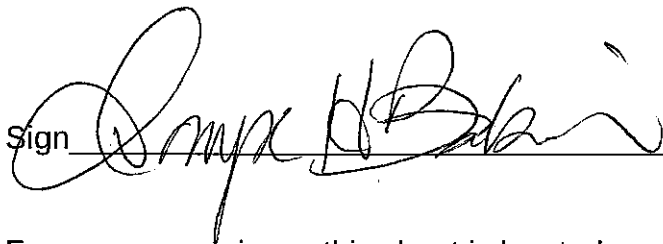
Most of my educational involvement has been 'in the trenches' as a teacher and counselor at Mount View High School (RSU 3), and now at Nokomis Regional High (RSU 19). As a parent, I was president of the 'parent-teacher club' at Unity Elementary when my own children were students there. When they were in high school at Mount View, I was class advisor for their classes, planned and organized graduation, and organized project graduation activities. I have had vast experiences in fundraising through these various involvements.

4. What special qualifications do you have that will help you to be a board member?

I have a wealth of experiences in the field of education, having taught high school English for 25 years followed by serving for 10 years as a school counselor. In both of these roles I have been an educational leader and been involved in curriculum development, grant writing, budget development, and peer coaching, to name a few. I have a deep understanding of the trials and tribulations involved in being an educator, as well as the challenges many of our students are faced with every day. I also have a fairly solid read on the community that serves the Ecology Learning Center.

5. What is your understanding of the role you will play as a public charter school board member?

I see a board not only as a governing body for the school but also a group of people who make up a team committed to the education of young people. I would like to think I could contribute to student-centered conversations that are based on a shared vision with the best interest of students as the outcome. I also would like to be able to play the role of sounding board in the conversations about academic excellence and educational growth at ELC.

Sign  Date 3-20-24

For your convenience this sheet is located on our website under Resources for Authorized Schools (<http://www.maine.gov/csc/>).

Please see the Maine Charter School Commission's Policy on Public Records.

Public Charter School Governing Board Member Information Sheet

Name of Public Charter School ___Ecology Learning Center_____

Name of Board Member ___Joshua Abram Kerksmar_____

Email Address _____jkerksmar@gmail.com_____

Occupation ___Professor_____

Please respond to the following questions:

1. Why do you wish to serve on the governing board?

I'd appreciate the opportunity to serve on the ELC Board for a few reasons. I was invited to apply on the basis of my work in environmental education, so I think my background would be a good fit. In addition, as a parent of two homeschooled children (ages 9 and 11) who is considering a range of high school options, I view board service as an ideal opportunity to learn more about the ELC as an institution. Most of all, I believe the ELC's mission is imperative in a world where people are increasingly disconnected from each other and the communities in which they live. To serve alongside others engaged in that work would be an honor.

In the process, I hope to gain a greater understanding of the nature of ELC's work, as well as any challenges in effecting it on the ground.

2. What is your understanding of the educational needs of students in the catchment area?

While I haven't made a study of schooling needs in Waldo County, I've taught enough first-year writing classes to know that traditional public education often fails students. It teaches them that "intelligence" means the ability to perform well on a test, or write a beautiful essay, and has no room for the idea that genius might lay outside those narrow bounds. The rubrics that I used never measured a student's facility with art, music, dancing, or any number of technical skills that,

perhaps, best captured their unique contributions to the world.

With this in mind, I believe we need to meet students where they are. What do their special gifts and abilities look like? What are they interested in? Then, on the principle that all things are connected, how might we teach them the ways that writing, or math, or anything else is connected to the things they already love?

This is hard work, and it's not always obvious how to make those connections. Nor do students always live in home environments that foster openness to academic inquiry. Nevertheless, I believe this work is essential if we're going to address the question of educational needs.

3. Please list any previous or present educational involvement; such as board member, budget committee, citizens committees, etc. List school(s) or district(s).

Board Membership

- Vice President, Preserve Rural Maine (2023 - Present)

Citizens' Committees

- Chair, Unity Transmission Line Committee, Town of Unity (2023 - Present)

Educational Involvement (Selected)

- Faculty Representative, Senior Staff, Unity College (2018 - 2023)
- Faculty Representative, TERRAIN Curriculum Design Team, Unity College (2019)
- Faculty Lead Designer, "History of Wildlife and Place" expedition, Unity College (2019)
- Co-Chair, Curriculum Assessment and Planning Committee, Unity College (2018 - 2020)
- Faculty Representative, Strategic Academic Leadership Team, Unity College (2018 - 2020)
- Faculty Representative, Academic Regulations Committee, Unity College (2017 - 2018)
- Chair, Sustainability Studies Faculty Search, Unity College (2017)
- Co-Organizer, Unity College Colloquium Series ((2017 - 2018)
- Faculty Advisor, Diversity Club (student club), Unity College (2020)
- Faculty Advisor, Guiding Eyes for the Blind Club (student club) (2016 - 2020)
- Committee Member, Lilly Fellows Program Book Award, Valparaiso University (2014-2016)
- Editorial Board Member, Fresh Writing, vol. 14, University of Notre Dame (2013 - 2014)

4. What special qualifications do you have that will help you to be a board member?

As an educator and faculty member, I have practiced listening to others' ideas, thinking through thorny issues, and collaborating on solutions.

As a researcher into things that happened in other cultures long ago, I've found that my initial ideas are wrong, and that a deeper understanding of culture and context is necessary to decipher any given past event. Doing history, then, has reminded me of the importance of asking good questions, listening to multiple perspectives, and being humble.

No piece of writing is ever perfect. But as a writer (and teacher of writing), I've practiced the art of communicating complex problems to a range of audiences.

As an amateur philosopher (and teacher of environmental ethics), I've challenged myself -- and my students -- with the idea that the purpose of debate isn't to "win" but to collectively move toward a more nuanced grasp of a complicated issue.

Finally, as someone who, over a five-year span after college, worked on a farm in New Hampshire, then took gigs as a commercial fisherman, a carpenter, a lawn care professional, and a dissatisfied office worker, I've acquired the habit of finding something fascinating and beautiful in everybody and (for the most part) everything.

5. What is your understanding of the role you will play as a public charter school board member?

My understanding is that I'll attend monthly meetings, participate in the summer retreat, and serve on a subcommittee that fits my background or skill set.

Sign  _____ Date March 20, 2024

For your convenience this sheet is located on our website under Resources for Authorized Schools (<http://www.maine.gov/csc/>).

Please see the Maine Charter School Commission's Policy on Public Records.

Public Charter School Governing Board Member Information Sheet

Name of Public Charter School: Ecology Learning Center

Name of Board Member: Tia M. Poulin

Email Address: tpoulin82@gmail.com

Occupation: Diversion & Deflection Program Manager

Please respond to the following questions:

1. Why do you wish to serve on the governing board?

My motivation for serving on the board of directors is to support the organization's values and goals in growing leaders prepared for real-world experiences. I hope to gain experience with board membership, make connections with the community, and know that we support youth.

2. What is your understanding of the educational needs of students in the catchment area?

After just having two children graduate from the public school system, I believe that students are missing a sense of connection. Especially post COVID. The social isolation that occurred over the past few years has disconnected our children not only from their peers but also from their teachers and community. The world today is much different than it was when I was a student, and they are dealing with much more intricate issues. Without connection to their community, caretakers and teachers, students are left to navigate it on their own and it is causing increased mental health and substance use issues.

3. Please list any previous or present educational involvement; such as board member, budget committee, citizens committees, etc. List school(s) or district(s).


No previous experience

4. What special qualifications do you have that will help you to be a board member?

I have a passion to impact the community by increasing barriers to entering the "system" either through criminal justice interactions, substance abuse or untreated mental illness. Through my work I have seen that building strong relationships with positive adults and receiving an education are two strong barriers for children to enter the system.

5. What is your understanding of the role you will play as a public charter school board member?

The role of board members is to keep the organization's core values and foundation in the forefront as they help to guide the organization into the future through growth and development.

Sign 

Date 3.19.24

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