



Maine Charter School Commission

School Performance Committee Committee Meeting

Published on April 1, 2024 at 1:28 PM EDT

Date and Time

Monday April 1, 2024 at 3:30 PM EDT

Location

Zoom

Agenda

Purpose

Presenter

I. Opening Items

A. Record Attendance

Susan Whipkey

B. Call the Meeting to Order

Tori Kornfield

II. Agenda Items

A. Mid-Year Meeting Reports

Discuss

Lana Ewing

1. Acadia Academy
2. Baxter Academy for Technology and Science
3. Community Regional Charter School
4. Ecology Learning Center
5. Fiddlehead School of Arts and Sciences
6. Maine Academy of Natural Sciences

	Purpose	Presenter
7. Maine Arts Academy		
8. Maine Connections Academy		
9. Maine Virtual Academy		
B. Fiddlehead Fund Request	Discuss	Lana Ewing
Commission Vote		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fund Request Part 1 • Fund Request Part 2 • Fund Request Part 3 		
C. Tentative Ecology Learning Center Fund Request	Discuss	Lana Ewing
Commission Vote		
D. SY 24-25 Budget: Innovation Fund Increase and Priority List	Discuss	Lana Ewing
E. SY 24-25 CountMEIn: Monthly PD	Discuss	Lana Ewing
F. MCSC/MDOE Communication Protocol	Discuss	Lana Ewing
G. Virtual Schools 3rd Party Evaluation Timeline	Discuss	Lana Ewing
H. Through Year Assessment	FYI	Lana Ewing
MDOE expects that results from the Spring 2024 Through Year Assessment should be available within 24-48 hours after the student is assessed.		
I. Executive Session: Spring Through Year Assessment Results: Grade Level	Discuss	Lana Ewing
III. Updates		
A. None		
IV. Next Meeting		
<i>May 6, 2024 at 3:30pm via Zoom</i>		
V. Closing Items		
A. Adjourn Meeting	FYI	Tori Kornfield

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

Mid-Year Meeting Reports

Section: II. Agenda Items
Item: A. Mid-Year Meeting Reports
Purpose: Discuss
Submitted by:
Related Material: ACADIA Mid-Year Report 2024-FINAL.pdf
Baxter Mid-Year Report 2024-FINAL.pdf
CRCS Mid-Year Report 2024-FINAL.pdf
ELC Mid-Year Report 2024-FINAL.pdf
FSAS Mid-Year Report 2024-FINAL.pdf
MeANS Mid-Year Report 2024-FINAL.pdf
MeAA Mid-Year Report 2024-FINAL.pdf
MCA Mid-Year Report 2024-FINAL.pdf
MeVA Mid-Year Report 2024-FINAL.pdf



2023-24 Mid-Year Meeting ACADIA Academy

On February 6, 2024, the Maine Charter School Commission staff completed a mid-year meeting in-person and via Zoom at ACADIA Academy (ACADIA) with Amy Dieterich, Governing Board President; Casey Baugher, Executive Director; and Heather Bucklin, Curriculum Coordinator. Topics covered included finances and facilities, academic proficiency and growth, student attendance, school climate, and student enrollment and recruitment.

Academics

Results from the Spring 2023 state assessment (Through-Year) were not available when reporting outcomes for SY2022-23. Schools were recently provided access to those results and ACADIA reports that 72.3% of its students are “at or above state expectations” in ELA and 50.5% are “at or above state expectations” in Math. The ELA and Math results are both above the state average for at or above expectations (state average: ELA - 64.6%; math - 48.7%). These results would be **exceeding expectations** (ELA) and **meeting expectations** (math) on the Performance Framework.

ACADIA Academy serves students Pre-K through 6th grade. The 6th grade scores in math are lower than the other grades. When asked how long these students had been with the school, the answer was “most for a long time”. Leadership offered some explanations for the lower scores:

- The school switched math resources when the current 6th graders were 3rd graders.
- This group has had inconsistent math teachers while at ACADIA – “It’s harder to keep math teachers”.
- The pandemic affected math (splinter skills).

ACADIA received a waiver for assessing the NWEA MAP, noting that “they are not a school that prioritizes standardized assessments” so current growth data is not currently available. They acknowledge the unreliability of the state data, but would choose to receive future waivers for NWEA testing if offered by the Commission due to the double-testing impact on students.

Supporting students to read on grade level has been a priority this year. The school uses Fountas and Pinnell for benchmarks and additional assessments throughout the year to determine students' reading levels. Students are grouped and regrouped by results so they are receiving the required differentiated instruction. The school reports that 60% of third grade students are currently reading on grade level.

ACADIA implemented the Building Assets, Reducing Risks (BARR) framework this year and reports that it “has been a success”. The BARR system uses eight interlocking strategies that build intentional relationships (staff to staff, staff to student, and student to student) and utilizes real-time data to enable schools to achieve concrete academic, social, and emotional outcomes for every student.

Student Attendance

At the time of the mid-year meeting, ACADIA reported a chronic absenteeism rate of 14% which is **meeting expectations** on the Performance Framework.

The rate is slightly higher than the end of SY2022-23. Although the numbers are still good, leadership reports that “we have been a really sick school this year”. The school reports that “more students are missing days that did not miss in the past” and that “we have a lot of families that attend, so if one sibling gets sick, the others get sick, and they are all out of school at the same time”.

School Climate

Student results and Teacher/Staff results on the Spring 2023 Panorama School Climate Survey were low and **did not meet expectations** on the Performance Framework. It should be noted that Teacher/Staff participation was low with only 49.1% of teachers and other staff completing the survey.

Leadership feels that the questions on the survey “may have been confusing” to the younger grades and that there “were many challenges with the 6th grade group so the results aren’t that surprising”.

Families reported being happy with the school, but participation rates were low which leadership describes as “puzzling” as families were provided many opportunities for participation. The team noted that the survey window was at the same time the school was sending “lots of correspondence” home regarding the split from their longtime partnership with John F. Murphy Homes (JFM) which may have caused the lower participation rates and “certainly” had an impact on overall scores.

Based on the survey results, ACADIA set the following goal - “We will expand our coaching and observation model reflecting best practices and increased administrative and behavioral support. 50% of staff will respond positively to the cumulative *Feedback and Coaching* questions during next year’s survey up from 25% in 2022-2023.” When asked if they were meeting that goal, Casey reports that leadership meets with teachers three times each year (none of which was in place in previous years) and that “a tremendous amount of time has been dedicated to this [focus] this year”. He also reports that there is more collaboration in the school – “this year we’re more one team, before it was more segregated”.

The leadership/administrative team met to review the results, but they were not shared with the entire staff.

Student Enrollment and Recruitment

The school reported that there are currently 248 students enrolled – an increase of 2 students since the 10/1 student enrollment count was certified. ACADIA will continue to enroll students, but noted the high needs of students enrolled midyear. The cost of out-of-district placements for a few students has had a significant impact on the budget, which will be discussed later in this report.

Projected enrollment for SY2024-25 is 250-255 (contracted enrollment is 272 students with a +/- 10% enrollment variance). Casey reports that “enrollment remains very strong” and believes there are only 3 students who are not planning to return to ACADIA next year. They held an enrollment

lottery last year (using the Commission-provided platform, Lotterease) and believe they will do so again this year and report feeling “confident that a waitlist will be needed in several grade levels”. They remain committed to no more than 17 students in a classroom as they “want to remain faithful to the small classroom size that families expect”.

Their PreK program has a capacity of 32 students. With 16 spots being filled with siblings of older students the school noted that it is a challenge to increase student diversity.

This year’s 6th graders are the first group who have been with the school since PreK.

Finances

ACADIA Academy has faced several financial challenges this year, but Casey reports that “the school is making gains financially”. A hurdle to overcome was the invoicing of several grant revenues (i.e., ESSERF funds) that had not been done in some time. They are starting to see the revenues from the invoicing work that has been done, reporting that each “pocket is approximately \$70,000”.

The biggest financial challenge is out-of-district placements for special education students. The school has 5 students that are currently placed out-of-district and these placements carry a price tag of \$6,000 per month, per student.

The recent line of credit they received from a lender will be paid in full within the agreed-upon 6-month timeframe and Casey “doesn’t feel that there will be a need to extend”.

The FY23 financial audit has not yet been completed. They asked the Maine Department of Education (MDOE) for an extension to March 31st, which was granted. As of the mid-year meeting there is no reason to believe that the school will not meet that deadline. The software that they were using from JFM was “antiquated” and they have since migrated to Quickbooks. Migrating all of the data into one place has “been challenging” but they are able to generate needed financial reports from Quickbooks “within minutes” where the old software could take “hours, sometimes days”.

ACADIA reports no compliance issues with the MDOE or its lenders.

They have begun the budgeting process for FY25 noting that it “should be easier after having created a 3-year plan”. They report having to make “tough, reorganizational changes next year” as funding is coming to an end that is currently being used for Teaching Assistants and Ed Tech IIIs. They are focused on answer the questions:

- How do we retain staff?
- How do we bring the out-of-district placements back in-house?

The school facility is currently at capacity, and the school leadership team and board have discussed potential expansion solutions. There is a 2-acre plot of land adjacent to the building that might become available. Leadership has had initial conversations with the property owner, but nothing has been formalized. They are aware of funding that is available for PreK expansion and have 40-60 students on the waitlist, but do not currently have the space to take advantage of the opportunity.

The board reports being asked to expand to grades 7 and 8. It’s something they have considered but space in their current location is a barrier. They have discussed moving their entire facility, but

are concerned about finding a buyer for their existing facility. With the closure of Harpswell Coastal Academy, there is no charter middle school available (other than the two virtual schools) for 6th grade students after they finish at ACADIA so most return to their sending districts (primary Lewiston Middle School or Auburn Middle School).

The school reports that the transition away from JFM “was chaotic at first, but is going OK”. The relationship was described as “an able partner, but not a willing partner”.

ACADIA contracts with Northeast Charter for their transportation needs. “The service is great, but expensive” (current costs are \$15,000-\$17,000 per month). Casey has looked into other options, but there “just aren’t any”.

Governing Board

Amy reports that this is the first year since the school opened that they have a strong Administrative Team and they are starting to see the Curriculum Coordinator role “paying dividends”. Amy also shared that the board is now in a place where they can focus on the curriculum because “there are no other fires that we have to put out”.

When asked about concerns, Amy reported the following:

- Money (“salaries are commensurate with local districts, but the benefits are not as good so it can be hard to retain staff”);
- Summer programming and how that impacts staff retention (“the board has heard [the concern from staff] and is trying to make changes that are palatable”);
- Lack of a strong fundraising plan;
- Application and maintenance of grants “is difficult”;
- Space

The board is considering a succession plan. Amy is in her second to last year on the board (and in her last as board president). They are focused on transitioning officer positions to “the next generation”. They have two vice chairs this year with the hope that one will be chair when Amy’s term expires.

The board currently has eleven members, comprised of a mix of different professional backgrounds and members of the community who have children at the school and some who do not (one member of the board was the Executive Director of a charter school in Boston). The maximum number of board members is capped at twelve, and the board is open to filling the last remaining spot with someone that is the right fit, but is not actively recruiting.

Amy reports that the administration team “really backs each other up”. She checks in with Casey regularly to see what his needs are.

Other

Casey is “anxious to see what the changes will be to the Performance Framework” and reports being supportive of the changes that were previewed at the last School Leaders’ Meeting. They have created new custom framework targets that are in effect this year and they think they will “really like” them.

ACADIA will be in their renewal year during SY2024-25. Amy asked if there were any planned changes to the process.

Recommendation(s)

- Consider sharing the results - and leadership's response - from the Spring 2023 Panorama School Climate Survey with the entire staff.



2023-24 Mid-Year Meeting Baxter Academy for Technology and Science

On January 31, 2024, the Maine Charter School Commission staff completed a mid-year meeting in-person and via Zoom at Baxter Academy for Technology and Science (Baxter) with Thorn Dickinson, Governing Board Chair; Ruth Dean, Governing Board, Vice Chair; Anna Klein-Christie, Executive Director; and Cicy Po, Principal. Topics covered included finances and facilities, academic proficiency and growth, student attendance, school climate, projected graduation rates, and student enrollment and recruitment.

Academics

While preparing for the mid-year meeting, Commission staff discovered that Baxter did not administer the Through-Year Assessment in Spring 2023. When asked why, Cicy shared that “she read somewhere that the assessments weren’t required last year, but would be this year”.

Baxter reports that “Our trademark program - Flex Friday - has become more rigorous and more relevant to the use of STEM in addressing real-world problems. The new SIS capacity has made tracking outcomes more consistent across the entire student body. The ninth-grade students were focused on a Lego-robotics project in one semester, giving them a consistent project management education and access to beginner robotics technology. This provides a stable footing for their more sophisticated projects and development of their presentation skills.”

The whole school GPA is 3.37, a 0.05 rise from last year.

It is unclear from the mid-year meeting what Baxter’s plans are for administering a post-secondary assessment (i.e., Accuplacer or SAT). Cicy shared that they are “working hard on being compliant, but have a lot of families opting out of assessments”. Thorn recognizes the value of the additional assessments and wants to have further discussions around what Baxter can be/should be doing.

Baxter administers the IXL to incoming students to gauge their academic baseline.

Over the past three years, Baxter has focused on its role as a member of the Portland community and not being geographically located in the city of Portland. The school is working with resources in the Portland school district to provide support for the new American populations that are growing due to the most recent refugee resettlements. This past summer, they hosted an English Immersion Program for students who were living at the Portland Expo and now have students from Angola enrolled at the school. They are using Title I/IV funds to support language, transportation, and supplemental technology.

The new American students have a 100% success rate in passing classes with a GPA average of 3.3 for the fall semester.

Baxter recognizes the "societal pressures" as a STEM school to take a critical look at providing access to STEM success for all of its students, specifically focused on young women. 37% of students and 27% of teachers identify as female and the school is analyzing what it is like to be a young woman student at Baxter.

Their first priority is addressing gender inclusion in STEM across all departments. Faculty developed a Fabric Design Course in the Design department and Intro to Design is required of all 9th grade students. A Baxter Academy student was recently named by the Society of Women Engineers as one of five outstanding students in 2024 and the science program has grown as a place where female students can thrive.

Leadership shared that "Baxter's greatest asset is our teachers" and recognized the strength of their many external partnerships who serve as program sponsors, mentors, internship hosts, and educational leaders.

Student Attendance

At the time of the mid-year meeting, Baxter reported a chronic absenteeism rate of 22% with the highest rate of absenteeism in the 11th grade. If this trend continues they'll **approach expectations** on the Performance Framework. This is an improvement from SY2022-23 where 36.21% of students were chronically absent.

Some of the improvement in attendance can be attributed to better recordkeeping. The way they communicate with students regarding absences has shifted. Instead of robocalls for absent students, teachers reach out personally by phone to say, "Hey, we really missed you in school today."

School Climate

The results of the Spring 2023 administration of the Panorama School Climate survey were mixed from families, teachers and staff. Families ranked School Climate and School Fit favorably, but had concerns about School Safety. Teachers and Staff appear satisfied, but expressed concern with Feedback and Coaching. Teacher/staff participation was 71.1% which automatically gave them a **does not meet expectations** on the Performance Framework.

Student results were extremely low. In response to the results, the school set a goal to increase positive feelings of energy throughout the school (i.e., supporting extracurricular activities and clubs, and working with students to support other students).

The school dealt with a challenging expulsion last year and feel that the situation may have contributed to the survey results.

Projected Graduation Rates

The school is tracking to graduate 98% of its 12th graders which would **exceed expectations** on the Performance Framework. This is an improvement from the 96.7% that graduated last year.

They have a Care Team that meets weekly and are currently watching two students who are "vulnerable in fulfilling their graduation requirements".

Student Enrollment and Recruitment

Baxter certified 373 students on 10/1, the highest enrollment they've had in several years. The Class of 2027 was as high as it has been since 2018.

Despite the constraints of deep cuts in the operations/outreach budget, outreach has been "creative and robust" and has included collaborative programming focused on Minecraft, Drones, Chess, and STEM/language immersion.

Baxter hosted a well-attended Prospective Student Day hosted by student Ambassadors and there has been investment in advertising in local newspapers, which has reportedly been effective in connecting the school to local families.

Finances

Based on FY24 QTR2 numbers, the school's finances are **low to moderate risk** in all financial categories on the Performance Framework.

They started the year "knowing it was going to be a really tough year financially" and were transparent with staff about the financial challenges of low enrollment, etc. They have experienced unexpected costs for transportation (\$80,000) and interpreters for deaf students (\$60,000 per student in addition to mileage to bring interpreters to Baxter). The state only reimburses \$10,000 of those costs as they "don't meet the threshold for hardship".

Baxter is constantly looking for sponsorships and other grant opportunities and recognizes the need to "invest heavily" in equipment for the classrooms – "we should have the finest science and technology equipment in the state".

Their business manager left during the school year last year and they have had a consultant cover the financial accounting until a replacement could be found. The consultant discovered that there were a quarter of a million dollars in outstanding grant revenues that had not been invoiced. This has been taken care of and the "cash flow is getting better".

The FY23 financial audit is not complete and an extension has been granted by the MDOE to the end of February.

Baxter will refinance their current debt and "is excited about the new interest rate" which is reportedly a percent lower than the current rate. They have partnered with Pierce-Atwood for help navigating the complexities of the refinance and Thorn shared that the financing will be "simpler than last time".

They continue to look at their 3-year financial plan and make updates as needed to show the current forecast and "are always keeping an eye on those future years". The board complies with the Commission's requirement to submit their 3-year plan, and "tweaks" the plan internally to make sure that the projections are as accurate as possible.

The school reports no compliance issues.

Competitive salaries for teaching staff continues to be a challenge as Baxter's teachers are paid 10-15% less than teachers in other Portland-area schools. They are in the process of negotiating a

new Union contract and feel that the conversations around salaries will be “easier because of the budget transparency that the board has adopted”.

Transportation

Based on a recent analysis of transportation costs versus funds received from the state exclusively for transportation, it appears that Baxter is paying approximately \$100 more per student for transportation than what they receive in state subsidy.

Safe, reliable transportation is a challenge. A student recently moved to Lewiston and does not have transportation to get to a bus stop and another has moved and the walk to the bus stop is “very dangerous”.

Governing Board

Thorn and Ruth shared that the first year (last year) with Anna as the Executive Director was “unique” because of the many challenges that had presented themselves within the school community. It was “an all hands on deck” to support her in her new role. Things have settled down this year and rather than meeting weekly, it’s on an ad-hoc basis.

The board reports the need to get back to a formal evaluation process “looking at the big picture criteria” – i.e., teacher relationships/satisfaction and overall compliance.

A key priority of the board is making sure that the administrative team is getting the professional development they need, noting that “we need to keep good people engaged and happy”.

When asked about the required board training, neither Thorn nor Ruth felt it was heavy lift. They surveyed other board members who described it as “not arduous”. Overall they enjoy the PD that the Commission has offered and enjoys the opportunities to connect with board members from the other public charter schools.

The board is “incredibly proud of what the school has accomplished in the last year and a half” and noted that “they are on the right trajectory” and are anxious for the day when they have the challenge of a long waitlist.

Current concerns named include:

- Finances
- Legislative concerns
- Compliance
- The optimum number of students that can fit in the current building.
- Unfunded mandates

The board is actively working to recruit for two vacancies and have a few prospects. They discuss recruitment at every meeting. They shared that board members do not typically leave the board because they are unhappy. Typically vacancies happen because of term outs or because “life gets in the way and they no longer have time to serve on a volunteer board”.

Recommendations

- Reach out to CountMEIn regarding chronic absenteeism. Because Baxter is located in Cumberland County there are free services of which they can take advantage.

- Baxter writes their attendance policies. Be aware of unintended consequences, and get creative.

Next Steps (completed)

- Baxter to reach out proactively to the Maine Department of Education (MDOE) to discuss the ramifications, if any, of next having administered the required Through-Year Assessment and report back findings to the Commission.



2023-24 Mid-Year Meeting Community Regional Charter School

On January 22, 2024, the Maine Charter School Commission staff completed a mid-year meeting in-person and via Zoom at Community Regional Charter School (CRCS) with Stephanie Saltzman, Governing Board Member/Chair, Finance and Facilities Committee; Elizabeth Firnkes, Building Principal of Overman Academy; Susan Muzzy, Building Principal of Creative Children's Academy and Dimensions Academy; Jill Alves, Business Manager; Ashlee Savage, Administrative Assistant; and Travis Works, Executive Director. Topics covered included finances and facilities, academic proficiency and growth, student attendance, school climate, projected graduation rates, and student enrollment and recruitment.

Academics

Results from the Spring 2023 state assessment (Through-Year) were not available when reporting outcomes for SY2022-23. Schools were recently provided access to those results and CRCS reports that 44.6% of its students are “at or above state expectations” in ELA and 27.1% are “at or above state expectations” in Math. The ELA and Math results are both below the state average for at or above expectations (state average: ELA - 64.6%; math - 48.7%).

CRCS continues to use the NWEA MAP Assessment to measure growth for students in Grades K thru 11.

CRCS reports that 30 students will take the Accuplacer this year. Of those students who have already taken the Accuplacer, 74% are meeting the targeted reading score of 239 or higher and 79% are meeting the targeted math score of 226. The school is currently **approaching expectations** on the Performance Framework.

The board has an active Academic Excellence Committee that is “functioning very well” and meets on a monthly basis.

Student Attendance

Chronic absenteeism continues to be a concern. At the end of SY2022-23, the school-reported rate of chronic absenteeism was 38%. At the time of the mid-year meeting, CRCS reported a chronic absenteeism rate of 35% with the highest rates of absenteeism in grades 3, 10 and 12. If this trend continues, the school will **not meet expectations** on the Performance Framework.

The school reports that there is a group of students whose chronic absenteeism is improving. A new strategy that they are trying this year is recognition for Most Improved Attendance.

At Overman Academy, the building principal reports that there are several students who enrolled, but never - or very briefly - attended. In many cases, DHHS is contacted but “won’t touch it if the student is over 13 years old”.

The school has access to Tier 3 funding and has engaged the services of CountMEIn whose mission is “increasing student attendance through data-driven strategies so that every child is an engaged, successful learner”.

CRCS reports that there are 3 students (one in Kindergarten) who are currently truant.

As mentioned above, transportation is a barrier to getting students to school. For example:

- On Fridays when there is a ½ day of school, some students who drive may not attend school because of the cost of gas.
- If a bus driver shows up too early or too late to a bus stop, families will not be there.
- They have students who are now homeless and do not have access to transportation.

School Climate

Student results of the Spring 2023 Panorama School Climate Surveys were a surprise to school leadership and efforts have been made this year to improve those results. Efforts at Overman Academy include:

- Spirit Week;
- School “SWAG” (i.e., shirts, sweatshirts, and other clothing);
- Weekly assemblies; and
- Education about what a “neutral” response means relative to Panorama Survey results *and* preparing students to think about their responses based on the entire school year, not just a moment in time.

And at Dimensions Academy:

- Streamlining the process for reports of bullying; and
- Handling behaviors before they impact the classroom.

Families reported being happy with the school, but participation rates were low. The school is considering incentives for completing the survey (i.e., raffling off a sound bar). A survey coinciding with National School Choice Week was recently released to families and at the time of the mid-year meeting 55% of families had completed it, which the school sees as an encouraging sign for participation in the upcoming spring Panorama School Climate survey.

Overall, the results on the Panorama survey show that staff and teachers are happy at CRCS. Leadership is looking for ways to retain staff, such as a possible childcare option as a staff benefit. The forward-thinking discussions about staff satisfaction are in the early stages.

Projected Graduation Rates

CRCS graduated 92% of its seniors in SY2022-23, up from 80% in SY2021-22. At the mid-year meeting, the school estimated that 88%-92% of seniors are currently on track to graduate in 4-years. At the lower end of that estimation, the school would **meet expectations** on the Performance Framework and at the higher end would **exceed expectations**.

There are “a few” seniors that school leadership are concerned about for a variety of reasons. One student in particular is pregnant and has stopped answering text messages. This student has

been with CRCS “since the very beginning” and “has had excellent attendance” until recently. The baby is due next month and the school is unsure where she’s currently living.

The school graduated one student in December who is now enrolled full-time at SMMC.

Student Enrollment and Recruitment

The school reported that there are currently 362 students enrolled. The 10/1/23 certified student enrollment count was 381. Building principals report several reasons for the decline in enrollment – at Dimensions Academy the majority of the students who have left have done so because of transportation barriers and custody situations. Overman Academy has seen fewer students leaving the school this year. One chose homeschooling “thinking he’ll graduate faster than if he followed the programming at CRCS” and another left because of wanting to participate in sports programs that are not offered at the school.

The school has seen an increase in custody issues and homelessness this year, sharing that two staff members have become foster parents and “it’s not uncommon” for staff to pick up students who may be living in hotels.

CRCS reports that they “do very little advertising” and have current waitlist numbers as follows:

- 19 Pre-K students compared to “just under 10” at the same time last year;
- 19 students at Dimensions Academy; and
- 2 students at Overman Academy.

If the school were able to grow, their future target enrollment would be 700 students (50 students per grade level).

Finances

Based on FY24 QTR2 numbers, the school’s finances are **low to moderate risk** in all financial categories on the Performance Framework and the school reports no unexpected expenses to date other than property insurance rates that increased significantly since last year.

The school received its preliminary ED279 for SY2024-25 from the Maine Department of Education (MDOE) and is in the early stages of developing next year’s budget and updating their 3-year plan.

CRCS completed its financial audit for FY23 and copies have been provided to the MDOE and to their lender. CRCS has restated its audited balance sheet in 3 of the last 4 years, including from the most current audit. Our concerns about the restatements include:

- Evidence of restatement after CRCS had completed a state-required accounting corrective action;
- CRCS has been audited by the same auditor over the course of the restatements;
- CRCS has had the same internal accounting staff;
- Is an infrequent event for charters;
- The School did not give advance notice or explanation; and
- The School notified the state about possible restatements to already submitted reports only where expenses would have changed.

The board’s Finance and Facilities Committee Chairperson, who has experience in school finance, is aware of the restatements and will discuss with school leadership.

The Commission has recommended in the past that the school contract with a new auditing firm. The school reports that cost is the main barrier to doing so stating that the current audit costs \$10,000 while moving to a new auditor will cost \$30,000.

Maintaining three separate buildings continues to be a challenge both financially and logistically. Unexpected staff shortages impact programming and costs to “bring each building to where it needs to be” are comparable to the cost of one new facility. School leadership are in the early stages of talking with Highmark School Development – the nation’s leading developer of educational facilities - about building a new facility. The school team considers the location of a new facility will be key to attracting/retaining students and hiring staff who may be interested in the school’s mission and vision, but do not want to commute to Cornville and Skowhegan.

There is an outstanding extracurricular activity bill with RSU #54. School leadership met with Jon Moody, RSU #54 Superintendent to discuss and the CRCS governing board will form an ad-hoc committee to determine “the best path forward with finalizing the outstanding invoice”.

Transportation

Based on a recent analysis of transportation costs versus funds received from the state exclusively for transportation, it appears that the school spends more on transportation than they receive in funding. State law requires that a public charter school provide transportation within its defined catchment area and the school reports that “it’s a struggle” given the cost of diesel fuel. The school contracts with a local bus company to provide transportation, but has to pay for fuel costs separately. With buses getting 5 miles per gallon, the costs add up quickly.

The school feels that transportation is a barrier to attendance, which will be discussed separately in this report.

Governing Board

Stephanie Saltzman was the only member of the CRCS Governing Board who attended the meeting and she had to leave after the finance discussion. Commission staff were unable to ask Board Members the prepared questions. In the required pre-work, the board reported on the success of the Committee structure sharing that, “Committees are meeting regularly, engaged in their work, committed to school success, and reporting to the board on a monthly basis.”

They also reported an increased interaction between the board and the school sharing that regular presentations by staff and administration “help the current board members gain a better understanding of the school’s programming and achievements towards the mission/vision.”

The board identified a few areas of need - (1) having one or two additional board members, and (2) time for board members to learn more about the school’s programming.

Other

Heather King, Head of School at Maine Arts Academy, is evaluating Susan Muzzy this year. Susan reports that “this is going well” – the interaction has mostly been by phone, goals for this school year have been set, and Heather is planning an in-person visit in February. When a situation arises where a parent or other family member asks to speak with Susan’s supervisor, the situation dictates to whom the message is directed. Travis continues to evaluate Elizabeth Firnkes, and Travis is evaluated by the CRCS Governing Board.

Recommendations

- The school currently operates three separate campuses and has looked at operating expenses as a whole district, but has never done a comprehensive profit and loss exercise for each individual building and is encouraged to do so.
- Resolve outstanding extracurricular invoice with RSU #54.
- Secure a new auditor.

Next Steps

- The Board's Finance Committee should work with Jill to rectify the issues with audit restatements and present an explanation and corrective plan to the MCSC Executive Director.
- School leadership should keep the Commission informed regarding any decisions regarding a new building. This includes the timeline and possible locations.



2023-24 Mid-Year Meeting Ecology Learning Center

On January 25, 2024, the Maine Charter School Commission staff completed a mid-year meeting via Zoom with Ecology Learning Center (ELC) with Chris Lewis, Board Treasurer; Carol McGovern, Board Secretary; Leza Packard, Head of School; and Kayla Higgins, Dean of Students & Guidance Counselor. Topics covered included finances and facilities, academic proficiency and growth, student attendance, school climate, projected graduation rates, and student enrollment and recruitment.

Academics

Results from the Spring 2023 state assessment (Through-Year) were not available when reporting outcomes for SY2022-23. Schools were recently provided access to those results and ELC reports that 55% of its students are “at or above state expectations” in ELA and 39% are “at or above state expectations” in Math. Both are below the state average for at or above expectations (state average: ELA - 64.6%; math - 48.7%).

One third of ELC’s students were homeschooled before enrolling in the school. Their reading scores tend to be higher due to the independent nature of homeschooling, but math is challenging across the board. Students missed critical math skills due to the learning disruptions of COVID and were not receiving the direct instruction in math - particularly algebra - that you would typically see in a middle school student. This is particularly evident with the current group of 10th graders.

ELC continues to use the NWEA MAP Assessment to measure growth for students in Grades 9, 11, and 12.

The school has not yet assessed the Accuplacer, but has plans to do so in April. They report a large population of students interested in taking the SAT.

ELC continues to invest in “Wellness and Work Wednesdays” and recently engaged with a facilitator from Harvard. Leza shared the following story from a recent wellness class that she is teaching:

She took several bottles out of the recycling bin (Pepsi, Mountain Dew, etc.), covered up the nutrition labels and asked students to guess the number of calories in each soft drink. When she returned to the recycling bin a second time to gather more bottles for class, she saw evidence that students were choosing more nutritious alternatives.

Leadership reports “leaning on” department heads more this year than in years past and voices the importance of NWEA data and how it’s used. Kate Coseo, Science & Math Teacher, recently

gave a “well received” NWEA results presentation to the Board and is available to support peers as needed.

Subgroup growth is “really high” particularly for students with disabilities. The school has two (2) half-time special education teachers which is double what they’ve had in the past. They have also employed two (2) additional full time ed techs who are available for students as needed.

Four post-secondary sessions have been held with seniors, including a session focusing on FAFSA support and FAME and students are using Google Classroom to keep track of scholarships. They are beginning this work with juniors who will learn about internships, mock interviews, and writing polished resumes. Growth is being recognized through “soft skills”.

Student Attendance

Chronic absenteeism continues to be a concern although the school reports marked improvement from the end of SY2022-23 where 49.48% of students were chronically absent. At the time of the mid-year meeting, 27% were chronically absent with the highest absenteeism in grade 10 and the lowest in grade 12. If this trend continues, the school will **not meet expectations** on the Performance Framework.

ELC changed their chronic absenteeism letter to families to have a “softer tone” and to come across as “less punitive”; however, several families are experiencing hardships that can be perceived as “embarrassing” and the school is providing “what we can, when we can”. They report instances of adult mental health that is “getting in the way of students coming to school”.

Transportation appears to be a significant barrier to getting students to school. Kayla reports receiving emails from students who want to be at school but can’t get there because they do not have transportation. The school has purchased additional vans, but currently have “just enough” and have to scramble if one goes down. The vans are costly. Students, particularly in the Bangor area, would not come to school if they were not picked up at home as traveling to a hub five miles from home is challenging. The school is accommodating, but is not compensated for the extra effort, which is a strain on the budget.

The school engaged with Character Strong at the beginning of the school year. Character Strong provides research-based curricula and training that increase belonging, well-being, and engagement for students and staff. They learned that conducting home visits to prospective students before they enroll is a great way to get to know their families. The hope is that families are comfortable enough with staff to ask for help when they need it (i.e., a gas card to help with the cost of fuel).

School Climate

ELC had strong results on the Spring 2023 Panorama School Climate Surveys, but had low participation rates (families and teachers/staff) which put them in the “does not meet” category on the Performance Framework.

Time has been spent during staff meetings discussing participation and Leza reports “enthusiastic” ideas on how to increase participation rates this spring.

Projected Graduation Rates

ELC graduated 100% of its seniors in SY2022-23, and are on track to do so again this year.

The school reports two (2) students have an IEP that includes a 5-6 year graduation plan and one student was on track to graduate in 4 years, but picked up Adult Education classes in order to graduate in 3 years to care for their siblings.

Student Enrollment and Recruitment

ELC certified 107 students on 10/1 and has lost 1 student so far this year.

Enrollment for SY2024-25 opened on January 5th and will close on March 20th with a lottery scheduled for March 21st. New enrollment is more than double from last year (59 students currently enrolled for SY2024-25 versus 26 in January 2023).

ELC was approved by the Commission to increase their contracted enrollment to 120 students for SY2024-25.

Finances

At the time of the midyear meeting, ELC was in talks to acquire an additional facility, but details could not be made public. Chris created a comprehensive pro-forma that takes the school through June 30, 2024 and cites cash flow as the biggest challenge. They report that “financially, this has been a harder year than the three previous years” and will be looking at areas of the budget where they can save money for the remainder of the year. They are concerned about fundraising and will embark on a “tight, exciting, and intense” capital campaign beginning on Valentine’s Day.

There is “a lot of effort at the board level” to get fundraising back on track and they have identified three potential candidates who have experience in fundraising.

There is a possibility that they might fall below the recommended 30 days cash on hand. Current cash on hand is in the **moderate risk** category, similar to numbers reported last year.

ELC switched to a new auditor this year and hoped to have the audit complete by the end of the calendar year, but has had to ask for an extension to the end of February which Leza describes as “frustrating”. ELC anticipates “no big surprises” when the final audit findings are presented.

ELC reports no plans to sell their current facility, nor take on any new debt. They are in a 3-year lease agreement with “the Annex”.

The school reports no compliance issues with the MDOE or its lenders.

Transportation

Transportation costs are “extremely high” and ELC is currently over budget. Leza reports that transportation costs for FY24 QTR1 were not reported with QTR1 expenses due to late billing from RSU 3. The true costs will be reflected in QTR2 numbers.

Governing Board

The board elected Beth Alma as its new chair back in December and is currently seeking additional board members. They have six (6) members, but feel that “8 or 9 is the sweet spot”. Before a candidate is considered, he/she must attend two board meetings.

Carol’s term ends this summer and they’d like to find someone with an educational background to replace her. Folks with fundraising and finance experience are also identified needs of the board.

Board members report “addressing facility needs and the financial piece that comes with it” as key priorities. They remain true to their mission, holding a “mission moment” at the beginning of each board meeting.

They focus on the needs of school leadership and talk regularly about succession planning.

Other

ELC updated its organization chart this year to include an Operations Manager and rearranged the daily schedule to include more professional development for staff. Students meet for 50 minutes, 4 days per week for both reading and math and for 85 minutes twice a week for humanities.

The school has forged a relationship with a local LCSW who is working directly with students at the school. Many of these students were on waitlists for counseling, but are now seen immediately.

Recommendations

- Make arrangements to administer the Accuplacer in the fall as a baseline. If there are students who are not meeting the targets, they can retake the assessment in the winter and/or the spring.
- When submitting quarterly financials to the Commission, be sure to include a balance sheet.



2023-24 Mid-Year Meeting Fiddlehead School of Arts & Sciences

On February 6, 2024, the Maine Charter School Commission staff completed a mid-year meeting in-person and via Zoom at Fiddlehead School of Arts & Sciences (FSAS) with Bill Doughty, Governing Board Chair; Jacinda Cotton-Castro, Executive Director; Jason Manjourides, Principal; and Jenn Merrill, RTI Coordinator. Topics covered included finances and facilities, academic proficiency and growth, student attendance, school climate, and student enrollment and recruitment.

Academics

Results from the Spring 2023 state assessment (Through-Year) were not available when reporting outcomes for SY2022-23. Schools were recently provided access to those results and FSAS reports that 74% of its students are “at or above state expectations” in ELA and 42% are “at or above state expectations” in Math. ELA results exceed state averages, and Math results do not. (Note - state reported data shows that 64.6% of students are “at or above state expectations” in ELA and 48.7% are “at or above state expectations in Math).

FSAS reports that “while state proficiency scores were where they expected them to be, the percentage of students meeting growth scores were a little low”. Scores on the fall state assessment were higher than the spring scores and they plan to administer the winter NWEA assessment which will give them fall to winter growth data.

Based on summer training, strong new hires, a new block schedule with more time devoted to academics, more student support, and a new principal, Fiddlehead expects to see improved growth in both ELA and Math.

At the time of the mid-year meeting, 10 out of 15 third grade students were reading on grade level. FSAS begins to teach reading in the first grade, but teachers start with younger students who are showing interest in reading. The school is currently exploring a literacy grant for grades K-2.

There are no reported concerns with subgroup results and it’s worth noting that ELA scores are “strong, despite having one of the highest special education populations in the state”.

FSAS has three staff providing RTI for grades 1 thru 8, with one devoted exclusively to grades 5-8. They recognize that math appears to be the biggest need and students are pulled out for math during scheduled literacy time.

Staff continue to focus on what mastery of the Maine Learning Results looks like at Fiddlehead. They are working on creating a comprehensive scope and sequence document for each grade

level, identifying gaps and filling them. They note that this work has been “challenging” as staff have taken knowledge with them when they have left.

Student Attendance

Chronic absenteeism continues to be a concern. At the time of the mid-year meeting, the school reported that 33% of their students are chronically absent with the highest absenteeism in grades 3 and 8, and the lowest in KG. Their 3rd grade class is small “so one student can skew the data”.

While this is slightly lower than SY2022-23, it still is **not meeting expectations** on the Performance Framework. It’s possible that the percentage may be slightly higher than reported as there were six students who have left Fiddlehead but were chronically absent while attending. These students were not included in the original numbers provided.

Leadership noted that absenteeism may be high because the messaging since COVID has been “if you’re sick, stay home and take care of yourself”. The school reported challenges with families who take their student(s) out of school to vacation.

They are actively looking at their attendance policies to see if changes to the policies could help improve their numbers.

School Climate

There were mixed results from the Spring 2023 Panorama School Climate Survey. Families reported being happy with the school, while student results varied depending on the age group. Students in Grades 3-5 ranked in the 10th percentile of like schools nationally, while students in Grade 6 ranked in the 50th percentile.

Overall, the results show that teachers and staff are dissatisfied. Leadership attributes some of that to not being able to find substitutes when needed and staff being asked to do more as a result. Planned budget cuts were especially hard, but Jason reports that staff satisfaction is “high right now” and Jacinda feels that having Jason in place will be a “huge boost to the satisfaction”.

It is unclear what the school is doing to improve student satisfaction results. Bill reminded us that Panorama (as well as NWEA) results were “normed” pre-pandemic and “have very poor validity because of that”.

Student Enrollment and Recruitment

The school reported that there are currently 187 students enrolled. The 10/1/23 certified student enrollment count was 197. A few students/families left because of health-related issues in the family, and others “left on good terms”.

They have made a conscious decision not to back-fill this year in grades 6 to 8 “because of the pressure it puts on teachers and classrooms”, but will do so judiciously in the o

Fiddlehead will hold Open Houses in February and March and will move the lottery out one week later than in years past to allow more time for marketing efforts. Last year they had their best year with 155 applications for admission received and they anticipate similar numbers this year.

Finances

At the mid-year point, Fiddlehead “is looking good financially” and will reportedly end the year \$120,000 net positive. On 10/1, they had a higher number of 8th grade students than estimated and have been informed by the Maine Department of Education (MDOE) that they will receive the additional state subsidy this year instead of having to wait.

Special Education costs are high. As mentioned previously, per the MDOE Fiddlehead is in the top 10 schools who serve the highest percentages of students with disabilities across the state. Some classrooms have as many as 40% of students with an IEP and at least three new students have come in requiring 1:1 support.

They have had a hard time finding special education staff (ideally they’d have one TA per grade level) and are currently working to be in compliance with state special education rules. They are in constant communication with families about services they are unable to provide and although families “aren’t happy, they’re sticking with us”. The school has set aside funding in case a student needs to be moved to an out-placement facility with high costs.

Fiddlehead used COVID money to replace windows and to upgrade the ventilation system in the existing building and may qualify for a \$105,000 rebate from Efficiency Maine for roof/heating projects/repairs.

The board is concerned about the implications of a proposed \$50,000 minimum teacher salary proposal and the effect that will have on the budget.

Transportation

Fiddlehead has one school bus that is owned by the school. It makes three bus stops daily - with the majority of students coming from the Lewiston-Auburn area. This bus is also used for field trips and transporting students to off-site locations.

They bought the bus five years ago and own it outright. Other than routine maintenance their costs are fairly low.

The school doesn’t feel that transportation is a barrier to attendance.

Governing Board

Bill reports that Fiddleheads greatest strengths are the people and the care they have for the students. He is “pleased” with the focused work in Math, the RTI program, and school leadership.

When asked about concerns, he shared the following:

- The roof and the cost of replacing it; and
- Staff turnover “We need to do more things to encourage people to stay.”

They recently added two new members bringing the number of board members to 7 which Bill says “feels like the right number”. They will lose three members at the end of the year and are actively recruiting to replace them.

The board is engaged in succession planning and talks regularly about how roles would be restructured if their current Executive Director were to leave.

Other

Fiddlehead is working through a 4-month revisioning process and has contracted with a consultant to help guide them. The revisioning will involve all stakeholders and will:

1. Help determine who the school is now.
2. What do children/students need?
3. How do we get there?

Jacinda describes this work as “critical” stating that what the school needed in its first 5 years is different from what they need now. Fiddlehead just celebrated its 11th birthday and Jacinda hopes that the school’s birthday is something that can be celebrated annually.

The school will hire a new Special Education Director. LeeAnn Arnold has held the position for the past five years, but is moving on to pursue other interests.

They are “always thinking about different revenue streams” (i.e., a private Pre-K program, the return of summer programming, etc.) and are beginning to think about what benefits to retain staff.

Recommendation(s)

- The school should think about budgeting its depreciation expenses.



2023-24 Mid-Year Meeting Maine Academy of Natural Sciences

On January 22, 2024, the Maine Charter School Commission staff completed a mid-year meeting in-person and via Zoom at Maine Academy of Natural Sciences (MeANS) with Mike Muir, Governing Board Chair; Matt Newberg, Head of School; Patrick Henyan, Assistant Head of School; Evan Coleman, Director of Curriculum and Instruction; and Ashley Hyde, Business Manager. Topics covered included finances and facilities, academic proficiency and growth, student attendance, school climate, projected graduation rates, and student enrollment and recruitment.

Academics

Results from the Spring 2023 state assessment (Through-Year) were not available when reporting outcomes for SY2022-23. Schools were recently provided access to those results and MeANS reports that 74% of its students are “at or above state expectations” in ELA and 34% are “at or above state expectations” in Math. ELA results are above the state average, while the Math results are below. The state average for at or above expectations are 64.6% for ELA and 48.7% for Math.

Based on participation data from the Maine Department of Education (MDOE), 80% of MeANS students participated in the spring Through-Year Assessment. There continues to be a disconnect between school-reported data and state-reported data and the school is “taking a deeper dive” into their Student Information System (SIS) to make sure it matches the state’s system (Synergy). School records show a 90% participation rate, with participation rates increasing to 98% in the fall.

Juniors and seniors are currently taking the Accuplacer and the school reports **approaching expectations** on the Performance Framework. Students who did not meet the targets will be reassessed this winter as a spring reassessment “feels too late”. MeANS reports very few discrepancies in the results from Threshold students versus Campus students and evidence suggests that Threshold students are outperforming at this time. Leadership is “not surprised with the Threshold performance” reporting a number of students who will graduate early and who are performing well at the local community college.

Evan Coleman, Director of Curriculum and Instruction, has recently taken on the additional role of Assessment Coordinator and shared that “there is no correlation between Through-Year Assessment results and Accuplacer results” and hopes for a more consistent model going forward. Evan reports that they have three (3) years of assessment data for juniors and “none of the data correlates with growth data for students”.

The school reports no concerns with subgroup results.

At the time of the meeting, MeANS was preparing for the 1st Semester Project Showcase and reports continually seeking better ways to show student success. Matt Newberg, Head of School, reports that the “academic program at the school has improved dramatically over the past couple of years” and shares that when he first joined the school “good things were happening” (i.e., SEL and social service work), but “school wasn’t always happening”.

The school’s current customized targets on the Performance Framework are attendance and engagement related and leadership is interested in revising the targets “to be more in line with what we do as a school”.

Student Attendance

The school has improved its chronic absenteeism rates significantly over the last several years, but the rate remains high. At the time of the mid-year meeting, MeANS reported that 34% of students were chronically absent – with the highest rates of absenteeism in grade 12 and the lowest in grade 11. If this trend continues, the school will **not meet expectations** on the Performance Framework.

MeANS cites several examples of situations that affect their chronic absenteeism data:

- A student enrolled at MeANS, spent 22 days at the school, and became chronically absent during that time. The student has since moved on to two different schools, but MeANS will continue to carry the absences throughout the year. This is true of 6-8 students.
- There were a “few students we took a chance on” who reportedly had rough attendance at their previous school. 45 days into the school year, they missed 45 days of school.
- Data shows “a tale of two classes” with one being students who miss 30+ days and the other being students who miss less than 2 days.

The school has formed an Attendance Task Force that will examine the many reasons why a student might be absent and what they might be able to do to mitigate those reasons. For example, there are students who “are nervous about showing up to school because they don’t have the clothes and/or equipment needed for a field trip” or students who are missing school because of COVID, but feel fine. Leadership feels that the mindset around attendance is being changed, but winter “is just brutal”.

Staff is interested in showcasing student engagement at MeANS. They know they have a large population of students who were chronically absent at their previous school, are still considered chronically absent but are attending school more frequently and are more engaged than before.

As with other data points reported by the MDOE, school-reported data and state-reported data don’t seem to align (likely because of MeANS’ extended school year). The school continues to work with the Data Team to find a resolution to this ongoing issue.

School Climate

Results from the spring administration of the Panorama School Climate survey show that students and families are happy with MeANS with both groups **exceeding expectations** on the Performance Framework. The school **did not meet expectations** for teacher/staff results in SY2022-23. School Leadership and School Climate are two areas where MeANS scored well, while falling below expectations on Professional Learning and Feedback and Coaching.

MeANS hopes to improve the School Leadership responses from 56% to 67% and has a plan in place to do so. When asked about thoughts on raising the scores in the other categories, Leadership shared the following:

- Evan meets one-on-one with every teacher bi-weekly and offers to sit in classrooms to help support teachers where needed sharing, “I’m here to help you figure this out”.
- The school holds two robust staff meetings weekly – one on Tuesday morning and the other on Friday morning.
- There are ten (10) “well planned” in-service days with PD built in.
- Pat is working closely with staff around behavior supports and interventions and with the implementation of BARR and MTSS this year it appears that staff are feeling more connected than in previous years.
- The school is holding more “all faculty events” including a barbeque at the beginning of the school year.
- Teachers appear to feel comfortable reaching out to school leadership.
- The “faculty culture feels very different this year”.

Projected Graduation Rates

MeANS graduated 88% of its seniors in SY2022-23, up from 59% in SY2021-22. At the mid-year meeting, the school estimated that 97% of seniors are currently on track to graduate in 4-years which exceeds the state’s annual target of 87% and would **exceed expectations** on the Performance Framework.

Student Enrollment and Recruitment

The school reported that there are currently 188 students enrolled. The 10/1/23 certified student enrollment count was 194 reporting that two (2) students left because “it wasn’t a great fit”, one (1) dropped out of school to attend Adult Ed, and (1) left because parents wanted them closer to another school. One of the students who left citing “it wasn’t a great fit”, enrolled in another school and unenrolled there because it also wasn’t the right fit and has since been incarcerated.

While still aspirational, the school plans to open with 200 students next fall (120 on Campus and 80 in Threshold).

Finances

For the past year or so MeANS has been working toward decreasing dependence on Good Will-Hinckley. In SY2022-23 MeANS brought their finance/business office functions in house, hired a new Business Manager, and tackled new accounting software. Their Business Manager left part way through the SY2022-23 school year and MeANS was unable to fill the position until this past summer. Fortunately they were able to fill the position with Ashley Hyde, who has worked tirelessly to get caught up and all reports indicate that the FY24 QTR2 financial submissions will be on time.

Due to the turnover in the Business Office, invoicing for grant revenues had not been done for some time. Ashley is working on getting that caught up and the revenue from that invoicing is “becoming clearer”. Ashley reports that cash is “healthy” and is being replenished by subsidy while waiting for grant income to be received.

Year-end financials were recently presented to the board and show a \$96,000 loss rather than the \$200,000+ that was anticipated.

Several years ago, MeANS received a financial gift from the Fifield endowment that is specifically earmarked for the Threshold program. The board chair reports that the funds are “doing well” in the current investment situation and that the board is looking at ways to build the endowment with more traditional fundraising.

The school has received its preliminary ED279 from the MDOE and has begun working on the FY25 budget and revised 3-year financial plan. Matt reports anticipated revenue as being “a bit under where they thought they’d be” so will have to plan for that. It’s possible that they might have to cut a teaching position in order to “make things align for next year”. Their budget is based on 200 students so there “is no wiggle room”.

When asked about the riskiest parts of the 3-year plan, the following was identified:

- The time it takes to manage grant expenses and getting those expenses reimbursed.
- Enrollment and recruitment.
- The challenge of fundraising to make up the difference between what they receive from the state and what actual expenses look like.
- The relationship with Good Will-Hinckley has changed so any of those expenses are “a bit of a wildcard”. Leadership noted that “it would not be a surprise” if GWH were to raise the rent on the building next year.
- Currently they are contracted with a Special Education Director on a part-time basis, but as needs increase, the hours needed for the position will increase.
- Staff compensation.
- Increased insurance rates.

MeANS recognizes the need for an experienced grant writer and has a person on staff doing the work. The RREV Grant is coming to a close and there are learning grants available in the state. They report needing to increase bandwidth to pursue those dollars.

The school reports no compliance issues.

Governing Board

The board currently has 11 members with a few open seats that they would like to fill. Recruiting for certain skill sets has been challenging as “board members are a bit shy to ask others to be board members”. Names of potential board members have been shared with the board, but have not been pursued to gauge interest.

The board reports programming as the school’s biggest strength while enrollment, finances, and attendance issues were noted as perceived weaknesses.

The board reports being “really happy with Matt’s work” and reportedly makes sure that he knows how they feel about his performance. They haven’t thought specifically about the individual supports that he might need in order to be successful. Mike shared that “MeANS has a top notch leadership team”.

The HR Committee is looking to refine the school leader evaluation tool to reflect what it is the board would like the school leader to do.

Mike reports that “the board’s vision is the school’s vision” – focused on hands-on work and agriculture and attracting students who are excited about those things.

They are currently engaged in a strategic planning process which is helping to ground goals for the future and hope to have the work finalized in the next few months.

Recommendations

- Continue to look at the financial models around the Campus and Threshold programs. Is one subsidizing the other?
- Think about goals for board member engagement (i.e., volunteerism - come to the building and volunteer two hours per month to work with a teacher, in the office, etc.).
- Think about succession planning for when Mike's term as Board Chair ends.



2023-24 Mid-Year Meeting Maine Arts Academy

On January 25, 2024, the Maine Charter School Commission staff completed a mid-year meeting via Zoom with Maine Arts Academy (MeAA) with Sherry Gilbert, Governing Board President; Tim Rector, Board Member and Chair of the Finance Committee; Heather King, Head of School; Rachel Roberge, Principal; and Jasen Richardson, Dean of Students and Chair of Academics. Topics covered included finances and facilities, academic proficiency and growth, student attendance, school climate, projected graduation rates, and student enrollment and recruitment.

Academics

Results from the Spring 2023 state assessment (Through-Year) were not available when reporting outcomes for SY2022-23. Schools were recently provided access to those results and Maine Arts Academy reports that 78% of its students are “at or above state expectations” in ELA and 31% are “at or above state expectations” in Math. The ELA results are higher than the state average of 64.6%, while the Math results are lower than the state average of 48.7%.

MeAA describes their reading scores as “solid” and attributes the high student proficiency to being an art school noting “students have a creative background”. They acknowledge the struggles in math and are doing the following:

- Have two full-time math teachers (one who is a “very seasoned”)
- Have four transitional or Title 1 math classes where students are moved around on a weekly basis and placed as needed.
- Are in Week #2 of a new tutoring program using extra COVID relief funds.

MeAA recently completed the Accuplacer assessment with 95% of 12th graders meeting performance targets in both reading and math which is **exceeding expectations** on the Performance Framework.

Student Attendance

At the time of the mid-year meeting, Maine Arts Academy reported that 12.1% of their students were chronically absent which would **meet expectations** on the Performance Framework.

Leadership shared that keeping the absenteeism rate low is a full team effort. The attendance coordinator is “on top of absences and makes calls to families every day” and staff “are picking up kids and going door-to-door to get kids out of bed and into school”.

School Climate

Results from the Spring 2023 administration of the Panorama School Climate surveys showed that families, teachers, and staff are happy with the school. Student results were “somewhat of a

surprise” and could be attributed to some staffing issues that plagued the school last year. Effort is being made to talk with students prior to the administration of the surveys this spring to gauge overall satisfaction. New this year is the “Green Team” which recognizes students for being positive role models and a student-led club just finished painting a wall with things that they like about the school.

Projected Graduation Rates

MeAA reports that they will graduate 100% of seniors this year, an increase from 98% in SY2022-23. These numbers **exceed expectations** on the Performance Framework and when asked about the “secret sauce”, leadership attributes their success to arts programming and note that graduates leave the school with marketable skills.

11th graders are all on track to graduate in 4 years, but there are a few 10th graders who are currently truant and at risk of dropping out. Leadership reports “doing all we can” to re-engage these students.

There are two students who have requested early graduation with the intent of going on to continue their education.

Student Enrollment and Recruitment

The school certified 237 students on 10/1 and as of the mid-year meeting had 230 students enrolled. They have been able to backfill open seats with students from the waitlist. Many of the students who have left are involved in DHHS situations and “school is the last thing on their minds”. There are some “frequent fliers” with behavioral issues that have moved around to all the schools in the area, never settling in one place and there were a few students who left to return to their resident district high school “due to a break up” and the school “was sad to see them go”.

Their projected enrollment for SY2024-25 is 265 students. They plan to market the school using Spotify for advertisements and to run a full page advertisement for two consecutive Sundays in the local newspaper.

School leadership maintains their interest in expanding to include middle school students.

Finances

Based on FY24 QTR2 numbers, the school’s finances are **low to moderate risk** in all financial categories on the Performance Framework and the school reports no unexpected expenses to date.

The board reports that purchasing a new building with unknown costs was “frightening” but “things have gone well”. They were able to “guesstimate” costs based on spending by the previous owner and have been able to cover those costs, finishing the calendar year “with money in the bank and at least 30 days of cash on hand”.

Leadership shared that their planned construction - adding a dance studio and enlarging classrooms - “hasn’t started yet”. They accepted a bid from a contractor who was supposed to begin the work just after the holidays. Their current loan structure has them paying interest-only on the construction loan until the construction begins.

The Finance Committee reviewed an energy efficient proposal to redo the lighting in the hallways. The cost of this project is approximately \$118,000 and will seek funding to complete the project.

They received a \$100,000 safety grant in November and are working on signage, outdoor lighting, safety film for the windows, and training for staff.

MeAA continues to look at their 3-year budget with the requirement to put money into a rural development account front and center. This money is earmarked for building emergencies (i.e., the furnace goes out, etc.). They have \$113,000 set aside currently with \$50,000 slated to go in next year.

The FY23 audit was completed on time with no significant findings.

The school reports no compliance issues.

Transportation

Maine Arts Academy contracts with the same bus company as Community Regional Charter School and “pays double” for the same services. Heather has reached out to bus companies that are more local to the school, but they are unable to assist because they do not have drivers.

The school owns a mini bus and has explored the possibility of hiring a bus driver.

Their contract with the bus company does not include fuel which is a separate expense. It is estimated that they are spending approximately \$140,000 more than what they receive from the state for the cost of transporting students.

Governing Board

There are no open seats on the board. They currently have 6 members, with their bylaws stating they can have as few as 3 or as many as 16. Sherry reports that the current members have a wide variety of talent – legislative, legal, development, special education, etc.

The board reports that their ideal size would be 8 members and are looking for arts and education backgrounds specifically.

Sherry’s term as Board President will be up later this year and succession planning is happening.

When asked what the board does to support Heather and school leadership, Sherry responded that “Heather doesn’t need a lot of help from the board”. She feels that the board is both supportive and encouraging of the work that Heather does and shared that they have just completed her annual evaluation but have not presented it to her yet.

Sherry cites increasing finances and the needed renovations as the key priorities for the board. She is thankful for the administrators and wants to keep them long term.

The board is supportive of expanding the school to include middle school students.

Other

The staffing challenges from last year appear to have improved. They report no current vacancies, but know of a few teachers that are not planning to return next year.

They report “desperately needing a ½ time special education position” but funds aren’t available to hire. They’ve had to restructure classrooms to ensure coverage for students with behavioral challenges.

The administrative team is “pretty settled” in their roles at this point. Jasen has had to wear many different hats (handling the 504s, mentorship/coaching, and teaching) and will primarily focus on teaching next year. Rachel will focus on student behavior. Teacher evaluations are currently on schedule with Rachel doing the coaching and writing the evaluations.

Leadership continues to foster community partnerships including the Colonial Theater, Healthy Community Augusta, UMA, Colby, the Viles Arboretum, and Stained Glass Express. Heather has forged a relationship with the Augusta’s school board chair and continues to work with Wendy Betts on financing, grants, and compliance.

Recommendations

- Engage the services of a new auditor.
- With the delay in construction, it may be worth reaching out to Kennebec Savings to see if they are willing to offer any relief until the construction begins.

Next Steps

- If the board wishes to pursue the proposal to redo the lighting in the hallways, Maine Arts Academy will be required to complete the Request to Incur Debt form and get Commission approval before proceeding.



2023-24 Mid-Year Meeting Maine Connections Academy

On March 5, 2024, the Maine Charter School Commission staff completed a mid-year meeting in-person and via Zoom at Maine Connections Academy (MCA) with Connie Ronco, Board Member; Walter Wallace, Head of School; Joy Kiely, Special Education Director; Amy Trunnell, Business Manager; and Lauren Thompson, Assistant Principal. Topics covered included finances and facilities, academic proficiency and growth, student attendance, school climate, projected graduation rates, and student enrollment and recruitment.

Academics

Results from the Spring 2023 state assessment (Through-Year) were not available when reporting outcomes for SY2022-23. Schools were recently provided access to those results and MCA reports that 78% of its students are “at or above state expectations” in ELA and 33.3% are “at or above state expectations” in Math. The ELA results are above the state average (64.6%) while the Math results are below (48.7%).

While pleased with the ELA results, MCA reports that the math results “were surprising” especially when compared to Spring 2022 results where 92.3% of students were at or above state expectations, with the state average being 81.3%.

Staff are spending time exploring why the math results are low and looking at the curriculum to see how it relates to the assessment. Some things they have identified and steps they are taking to see improved results this spring are as follows:

- There has been learning loss and the development of poor study habits as a result of COVID. MCA added an Ed Tech to run a “Learning Lab” where students who are behind in work completion can go to get the support they need. They anticipate that 8-10% of the student population will benefit from this new program.
- They have added before and after school, weekend, and vacation tutoring to students. Current staff will cover those tutoring sessions and will receive a small stipend to do so.
- Incoming middle school students are coming into MCA “really needy” and need additional supports - essentially “they need support in everything”.
- They are looking at the curriculum. The math curriculum is a Pearson-developed curriculum which is aligned to state standards. Teachers are able to make adjustments as needed. As a result of lower than expected assessment results, not just in Maine but nationally, Pearson is adding an “Academic Impact Team” who will analyze data and look for trends.
- The school purchased IXL for all staff to use with students as needed (reading, math, and a social studies/science variation). IXL customizes learning plans based on students’ Through Year Scores in math.

Subgroup data is suppressed on the ESEA Dashboard, but the school reports that the special education population “did not perform well” on the assessments. As a result, they added a half time special education teacher and a half time social studies teacher mid-year.

Reportedly, the Fall 2023 assessment results “appear better” than the Spring 2023 results. Schools will report those results (and the results from Spring 2024) to the Commission during the end-of-year reporting period.

MCA issued the Accuplacer in November and reported that 83.1% of students met the College Readiness indicator target for ELA (239 or above) and that 85.25% met the College Readiness indicator in Math (226 or above). They will **exceed expectations** for ELA and **meet expectations** for Math on the Performance Framework. They will re-assess students who did not meet the target initially. At the time of the mid-year meeting, MCA had not broken down the subgroup data for the Accuplacer results.

The school requested a waiver for the administration of the NWEA MAP and will continue to not administer the assessment as long as the Commission allows for the waiver to be in place. Without that data, there are no growth results to be reported.

Student Attendance

At the time of the mid-year meeting, MCA reported a chronic absenteeism rate of 9.5% which would **exceed expectations** on the Performance Framework. Grade 7 has the highest chronic absenteeism (16.4%) while Grade 12 has the lowest chronic absenteeism (2.6%).

MCA has an active group that monitors attendance sharing that because they are a virtual school “we need to know where these kids are”. A weekly attendance report is distributed that flags students who are approaching chronically absent and the Advisor meets with those students who have been identified to attempt to resolve the attendance issue before they become chronically absent.

The school began using an attendance and absenteeism platform called DeansList at the beginning of the school year. This tool assists in getting students to Live Lessons - “kids who show up to class do better”. Teachers take attendance at the beginning of the class and after 8 minutes the program calls and emails parents of students who are not in attendance. The school has shown a marked increase in attendance since teachers started using the platform.

Special education students appear to have a higher rate of absenteeism than non-special education students and Joy reports that the school is “doing everything legally possible” to get the students re-engaged. Their approach is supportive, not punitive, unless there is no engagement from the student and/or the student’s family. They consult with their legal team to ensure compliance and conduct wellness checks and reports to DHHS when needed. The message to families is, “I’m liable for your student’s education”.

School Climate

MCA **exceeded expectations** in all categories of the Spring 2023 Panorama School Climate surveys. Family, student, teacher, and staff results show that all groups are happy with MCA with results in several categories in the 90th percentile or better compared to like schools nationally.

Walter reports that the school tries to be responsive to all staff needs. They monitor all contact with students/families (monthly) preferring a phone conversation or a Zoom meeting over text messaging. They have noticed a slight decline recently in the number of contacts but attribute that decline to staff traveling for three weeks because of state testing and a higher number of students this year than in years past.

Their goal is to increase student engagement and they offer stipends for teachers who take on extra responsibilities around student engagement. They have held two academic summits so far this year – one at the University of Maine at Orono and the other at Pineland in Gray.

Their custom goal on the Performance Framework is that “at least 80% of students will participate in one or more school sponsored field trips, activity day, special event, or club.” In SY2022-23, MCA **approached expectations** and reported that meeting the target this year will “be tough, but we’ve set a high bar for ourselves”.

Projected Graduation Rates

MCA reports that 88% of seniors are on track to graduate in 4 years. This would exceed the annual Maine Department of Education (MDOE) target and **meet expectations** on the Performance Framework.

The school has experienced a high number of 16 year old students who wish to drop out of school to attend an adult education program. Legally a student can withdraw when they are 17 years of age, but several adult education programs are accepting students at 16 years of age which puts the school in a “really tough position”. In order for a 16 year old to withdraw from school, both Walter and the Board have to agree to the withdrawal and Walter shares that he is “not going to let kids drop out of school at 16 years old”. The school has faced challenges, such as families claiming that “MCA is getting in the way”, and some adult education programs call the school “unethical”.

They report that 5-10 students legally transfer to adult education classes annually. From a state perspective the students are considered dropouts and bring MCA’s graduation rates down. Many students joined MCA “severely off cohort” so they have hired a staff member who is dedicated specifically to getting students back on track. The 11th grade is made up of “kids who have been failing and come to us as a last resort”. MCA uses the Maine State Diploma in order to get “some kids over the hump”.

Student Enrollment and Recruitment

The school reported that there are currently 486 students enrolled. The 10/1/23 certified student count was 510.

They did not need an enrollment lottery for next year and have 500 students/families interested in enrolling at MCA for SY2024-25. Due to the cap on virtual charter school students in Maine, MCA is unable to enroll more than 500 students.

MCA will begin to build its waitlist and will offer empty seats to students on the waitlist through November and then again at the mid-year point of the school year.

Finances

Based on FY24 QTR2 numbers, the school's finances are **low to moderate risk** in all financial categories on the Performance Framework. Joe Drago reports "no issues" with MCA as their Business Manager, Amy Trunnell, "does such great work".

MCA is currently in negotiations with Pearson for the next 5-year contract. The contract has not yet been signed. Walter reports that there were "some hard negotiations" around fees and feels that those conversations "were very successful". Based on the negotiations, it appears that they will save over \$200,000 per year which will be used for programming and personnel.

They have received their preliminary ED279 from the MDOE and are currently preparing the FY25 budget and updating their 3-year plan. The goal is to present the budget to the board during the April meeting.

MCA will be downsizing its office space "sometime in late July". They feel that this is "the financially responsible thing to do" and are looking at office space in Portland.

Transportation

Because MCA is a virtual public charter school they do not receive any state subsidy for transportation. They own a car that is available for staff to use as needed and report that the biggest expenses related to travel are around the state-required in person testing and the academic summits which are held three times per year.

Governing Board

Connie reports that the board is "feeling positive" about the negotiations with Pearson and have found them to be "professional and engaged".

The board is engaged and "almost always" has a quorum for meetings. Most members attend board meetings virtually, but Connie found value in a recent in-person meeting as it gave members "extended face-to-face time".

They have five active members and are not actively recruiting for additional members. They have one member who is a parent of an MCA student who is a senior this year. If she chooses to leave the board after her daughter graduates, the board is particularly interested in replacing her with another parent due to the unique perspective a parent brings.

When asked about MCA's strengths, Connie shared the following:

- the quality of the teachers and their engagement with students and each other;
- increased opportunities for social interaction;
- the "push" for attendance and the value of in-person live lessons;
- engagement with special education students and families and the assistance that is given to help students "gain their own independence"; and
- the amount of information that is shared with the board, particularly the "incredible job that Amy does explaining the finances."

Connie feels that the board is "open and supportive to the school's needs". She reports that the board has not had an opportunity to meet the teachers and would like to see them present at board meetings on a rotating basis.

MCA has one board member who has not completed the required MCSC board training modules. Connie shared that the use of “many different platforms isn’t entirely clear” and that it would be “helpful to have an overview of the platforms and the requirements”.

The board would like to see the state assessments conducted remotely. MCA is a virtual public school and many students who attend have chosen to do so because of extreme social-emotional issues. The requirement of in-person testing “really takes a social-emotional toll on many of our students”.

Recommendations

- Work with the one board member who has not completed the required board training to ensure that it is complete before end-of-year reporting.



2023-24 Mid-Year Meeting Maine Virtual Academy

On February 12, 2024, the Maine Charter School Commission staff completed a mid-year meeting via Zoom with Maine Virtual Academy (MeVA) with Donna Pelletier, Governing Board President; Stacey Blanchard, Governing Board Secretary; Melinda Browne, Head of School; and Donald Fournier, Academic Administrator. Topics covered included finances and facilities, academic proficiency and growth, student attendance, school climate, projected graduation rates, and student enrollment and recruitment.

Academics

Results from the Spring 2023 state assessment (Through-Year) were not available when reporting outcomes for SY2022-23. Schools were recently provided access to those results and MeVA reports that 58% of its students are “at or above state expectations” in ELA and 29% are “at or above state expectations” in Math. The ELA and Math results are both below the state average for at or above expectations (state average: ELA - 64.6%; math - 48.7%). The school achieved a 95% student participation rate for state assessments.

Spring 2023 Through-Year Assessment Results were a surprise to school leadership - “we went from doing better than the state to doing worse than the state”. They are digging into the data to determine why there was such a swing in the results and note the following:

- Grade 8 is a “challenging group” and the results support that.
- MeVA students “do great with norm referenced methodology, not as well with criterion referenced methodology.
- Needs two years of solid data to truly understand the results.

Currently the school is trying to determine how to better prepare their students for the assessments with “very few” resources provided by the Maine Department of Education (MDOE).

MeVA continues to use the NWEA MAP Assessment to measure growth for students in Grades 7 thru 11 (but only grades 7 & 8 are reportable on the Performance Framework). Growth results from Fall 2023 to Winter 2024 show the following:

- Math
 - 62% of students in grades 7 & 8 met projected RIT growth which would **exceed expectations** on the Performance Framework
 - Reportable subgroups (Special Education, 504s, Economically Disadvantaged, Male, and Female) are **meeting or exceeding expectations**.
- Reading
 - 48% of students in grades 7 & 8 met projected RIT growth which would **meet expectations** on the Performance Framework

- Reportable subgroups (Special Education, Economically Disadvantaged, and Female) are **meeting or exceeding expectations**.
- Language Usage
 - 49% of students in grades 7 & 8 met projected RIT growth which would **meet expectations** on the Performance Framework
 - Reportable subgroups (504s, Economically Disadvantaged, Female, and Male) are **meeting or exceeding expectations**.

MeVA reports that their formalized MTSS process has contributed to success with subgroups.

The school administers the Accuplacer “all the time” and are reportedly on track to **meet** the targets in the Performance Framework.

Student Attendance

At the time of the mid-year meeting, MeVA reported a chronic absenteeism rate of 6.82% which would **exceed expectations** on the Performance Framework. Grade 10 has the highest chronic absenteeism rate (10.25%) while Grade 8 has the lowest (2.98%).

School Climate

Results on the Spring 2023 Panorama School Climate Survey show that families, students, teachers, and other staff members are happy at MeVA, with many results in the 99th percentile of like schools nationally.

MeVA is eager to administer the Spring 2024 Panorama School Climate Survey and will open the survey window on March 25th.

Projected Graduation Rates

MeVA is on track to graduate 100% of its seniors this spring which would **exceed expectations** on the Performance Framework. Accuplacer results show that 100% of those students are ready for college.

It is important to note that they also graduated 100% of its seniors in 2023 and every senior must have a postsecondary plan that is tracked by the school.

Student Enrollment and Recruitment

MeVA reported that there are currently 449 students enrolled – an increase from the student enrollment count that was certified on 10/1/23.

Melinda reports that there is a “big push” to enroll at mid-year and that student retention is higher than it has ever been.

The school was recently granted an enrollment increase approval from the Commission which would allow them to enroll up to 495 students. Melinda reports that their current target is 450-460 for SY2024-25 and that they have no plans to go any higher “until we solve this proficiency problem”.

When asked who the typical MeVA student is, Melinda shared “the student is an economically disadvantaged student who struggled in their previous school”. There are many stories to share

about why a student/family chooses MeVA and those stories will be shared in the next Independent Third Party Evaluation that the school is required to conduct.

Finances

Based on FY24 QTR2 numbers, the school's finances are **low risk** in all financial categories on the Performance Framework and the school reports no unexpected expenses to date.

Despite being a virtual school, the MDOE requires that they conduct the state assessments in person twice a year. This is costly for the school - approximately \$75,000 - as they rent space for assessments and position staff around the state in order to proctor the assessments. Another expense is salaries and benefits for its sixty employees.

In addition to their Business Manager who is a CPA, MeVA employs an Accounts Payable Clerk who facilitates the daily financial operations of the school.

The school maintains insurance for a possible cyber attack and reports that there is no sensitive student information in their student information system (Infinite Campus).

MeVA completed its FY23 financial audit which was "clean," as has been every year.

They have received their preliminary ED279 from the MDOE and have begun the budgeting process for FY25.

The school has a lease for office space in Augusta and has no plans to move sharing that "it works for us". The space is used for state testing and in person meetings with staff. All of their student records are maintained in that space and they have plenty of room to assemble classroom kits.

MeVA reports no compliance issues with the MDOE.

Governing Board

MeVA's governing board has five (5) active members who regularly attend monthly meetings and a quorum is "typically present". Donna reported that she would not be opposed to having one additional member, but they are not actively recruiting.

All board meeting agendas and approved minutes are posted on time, **meeting expectations** on the Performance Framework.

In August, the board identified four goals for SY2023-24:

- Goal #1 - In order to support administrators and staff to provide a high-quality learning experience for the MeVA student population, all School Board members will participate in the minimal professional development opportunities provided by the MCSC per MeVA's performance framework.
- Goal #2 - The MeVA School Board will ensure the school provides a high-quality learning experience by ensuring the development of a rigorous program of studies.
- Goal #3 - The MeVA School Board will provide a continuous learning experience for students by engaging in the school's renewal process to begin in the Spring of 2024.
- Goal #4 - As the Maine legislature has enacted a new law specific to teacher salaries, the School Board will ensure the development of an updated regional competitive salary scale survey.

There are two board members who have not completed the required board training modules that the Commission requires.

Donna shared that MeVA's biggest strength is "having a strong administration who understands why they're there" - (i.e., supporting student success and supporting teacher development). She shared that the board is constantly asking, "what do our teachers need to support our kids?".

The biggest area of concern is the proficiency results from the state assessments.

Recommendation(s)

- Look into the possibility of investing excess funds.

Coversheet

Fiddlehead Fund Request

Section: II. Agenda Items
Item: B. Fiddlehead Fund Request
Purpose: Discuss
Submitted by:
Related Material: FSAS - Fund Request Form - February 2024 (Part 3).pdf
FSAS - Fund Request Form - February 2024 (Part 1).pdf
FSAS - Fund Request Form - February 2024 (Part 2).pdf

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.

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.

Applicant Information	
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

Workshop Purpose	
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

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

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

Coversheet

Tentative Ecology Learning Center Fund Request

Section: II. Agenda Items
Item: C. Tentative Ecology Learning Center Fund Request
Purpose: Discuss
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

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