

MAINE

CHARTER SCHOOL COMMISSION

Amendment Guide for Decreasing Enrollment

Charter District Information

Date of Request: December 21, 2023

Charter District Name: Maine Academy of Natural Sciences

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Please address all the following criteria in your request.

1. Describe how the amendment request is consistent with the school's mission and vision.

MeANS' focus on hands-on, experiential, project based learning requires a relatively low student-to-teacher ratio. Additionally, the general curriculum is based on a grade-level cohort model. These factors combined, create ideal class sizes of 12-15 students. Campus Intensives, one of our core curricular design elements, are organized by grade level and can comfortably accommodate 30 students. We strive to be innovative and deliver on our relational model of education. Advisories and classes need to be of reasonable size to facilitate a deeper connection between students and teachers.

2. Describe the need to adjust enrollment. How was that need determined? Demonstrate a compelling case for the decrease.

We are requesting a change in targeted enrollment to 200 total students for the remainder of our current contract which expires in 2027. We would prefer to focus on a total enrollment number versus breaking out specific Campus and Threshold numbers to allow for maximum programmatic flexibility.

This is a change from the current contracted totals of 210 for 2023-24 and 220 for 2024-27.

Given our physical space, the ideal campus total appears to be roughly 120 students with 30 per grade. Threshold has potential to expand, which may be able to make up for shortfalls within the campus program.

Our new number is also reflective of market saturation in central Maine with three 9-12 charter schools within 30 minutes of us. While one of the four schools has a distinctively unique focus, the remaining three are competing for students. Our immediate catchment area (Somerset County) is in demographic decline and we need to be realistic about the number of students we can draw. We would obviously like to grow, but need to establish our enrollment "sweet spot," a baseline that feels generally guaranteed annually for budget purposes. The attached attendance and enrollment report illustrates the effect that other schools have had on local sending district numbers.

Our current three year budget uses the targeted number of 200 students through 2027 and achieves unrestricted cash generation in that timeframe. We have achieved the growth in the Threshold program as outlined in our current contract (80 students), and the campus program was 6 students short of 120. It is also worth noting that despite very high enrollment goals in the 2017-2022 five year contract, the school's largest enrollment to date was 197 students in 2018-19.

3. Provide evidence that the school has engaged and responded to community stakeholders, including families and school staff.

During the period of highest growth (2015-2019), there were pressures to "fill the new building" and enrollment became mis-aligned with the mission and curricular focus of the school. In 2019-20, we began a strategic planning process that included staff, students, families, alumnus, and community partners to revise the mission and values of the school. One of the priorities became recruiting students that were more aligned with the school's mission. Unfortunately, this has also narrowed the market slightly. During this process, school staff overwhelmingly reported that many students were not at MeANS for the "right reasons" and the overall school culture was suffering. Teachers also reported that class sizes were too large and classroom management was an issue. Staff turnover was high and academically motivated students left or chose not to re-enroll. The campus enrollment for this time period was close to 140 students.

Recent Panorama Survey data for SY2022-23 indicates that MeANS exceeded MCSC expectations for families. More significantly, "School Fit" increased 12% from 2021 to 2022. This metric received a 75% favorable score as compared to the Maine Charter School average of 65% and ranks among the 99th percentile nationally! Clearly, efforts to align our students to the mission, values, and curriculum have been very successful.

4. Describe the desired results from an enrollment adjustment.

The desired result is establishing a reliable and realistic annual enrollment goal to align to our budget and operations. There have been several unrealistic growth plans over the school's contracted history. These plans may have suffered from changing circumstances outside the school's control such as grade level expansion at a neighboring school, the creation of a similar 9-12 school "next door", and the COVID-19 pandemic. MeANS would like to see a sustained, stable enrollment, establishing a foundation while exploring reasonable growth.

5. Provide a table showing the historical distribution of enrolled students in the present grade span, and the projected distribution of students by grade if the amendment request is granted.

<i>Year</i>	<i>Total Enrollment, 10/1</i>	<i>Contracted Enrollment</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<i>2018-19</i>	<i>197</i>	<i>200</i>	<i>98.5%</i>
<i>2019-20</i>	<i>196</i>	<i>215</i>	<i>91%</i>
<i>2020-21</i>	<i>184</i>	<i>235</i>	<i>78%</i>
<i>2021-22</i>	<i>187</i>	<i>275</i>	<i>68%</i>
<i>2022-23</i>	<i>173</i>	<i>190</i>	<i>91%</i>
<i>2023-24</i>	<i>194</i>	<i>200*</i>	<i>97%</i>
<i>2024-25</i>	<i>TBD</i>	<i>200</i>	
<i>2025-26</i>	<i>TBD</i>	<i>200</i>	
<i>2026-2027</i>	<i>TBD</i>	<i>200</i>	

**if amended*

6. Explain any unique circumstances related to the school's academic performance and academic growth, and corrective actions taken to address challenges in these areas of school performance.

We recently resolved a MCSC Intervention Letter by addressing several areas of concern including academic engagement, graduation levels, and chronic absenteeism. The culture and performance of the school have improved steadily and creating a reliable annual enrollment will assist with sustainability.

We have seen significant improvement in the strength of the academic program over the past three years. We have also been successful in securing grant funding (RREV, MEEA, etc) specifically focused on outdoor learning. These initiatives require smaller cohort

groups that can participate in off campus experiences.

7. Provide a staffing chart and narrative staffing plan to support the planning and implementation of the proposed decrease in enrollment.

Our current staffing plan model will stay consistent over the next three years. We have reduced our workforce in recent years to align with a smaller enrollment. With the exception of one teaching position, there will be no other proposed cuts.

Our organizational chart is attached.

8. Provide financial projections for the proposed decrease. Financial projections should reflect both immediate and long-term considerations that have been identified in implementation of the proposed amendment. Provide a detailed narrative explaining the financial forecasts, and the assumptions. Describe contingency planning for potential challenges in cash flow or budget shortfalls.

The attached three year budget illustrates our financial health during the remainder of our contracted term. As mentioned above, we will need to cut one teaching position in SY2024-25 to achieve our goals

Additionally, we have recruited a board member with decades of professional experience to lead the Development Committee and activate fundraising efforts. In their first year, they exceeded our budgeted fundraising goal by 72%. Alongside our new Business Manager and involved Finance Committee, MeANS has strong leadership to steer us toward a sustainable future.

One contingency plan is to move teachers to Threshold and increase the size of that program. Our waitlist has increased over the course of this year and currently stands at roughly 16 students.

9. If the school contracts with an ESP, describe how the ESP will support the planning and implementation of the proposed amendment.

This does not apply, we do not contract with an ESP.

Next Steps

Applications must be submitted via Epicenter prior to the school's annual open enrollment.

The MCSC staff will review the application and respond to the school to complete the review process. Typically, the process is completed within eight (8) weeks.

Recommendations to the Commission will be made based primarily on the district's compliance with the charter contract and performance on the contract's Performance Framework.