



## 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.