

MAINE

CHARTER SCHOOL COMMISSION

2024 Mid-Year Portfolio Summary

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

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

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

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

HIGH-LEVEL TAKEAWAYS

Strengths

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

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

Areas of Growth

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

Of Note

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

ACADEMIC

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

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

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

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

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

ATTENDANCE

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

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

GRADUATION

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

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

FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE

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

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

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

STUDENT ENROLLMENT AND RECRUITMENT

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

FACILITIES

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

SCHOOL CLIMATE

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

GOVERNANCE

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

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

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