APPROVED

Maine Charter School Commission

Minutes

Monthly Commission Meeting

Date and Time
Tuesday March 12, 2024 at 1:00 PM

Location
Baxter Academy for Technology and Science, 185 Lancaster Street, Portland OR Zoom

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

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

Reminders:

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

Any person seeking special accommodation for the public meeting should contact Amy Allen at (207)592-6364 or amy.l.allen@maine.gov.

Directors Present

Brian Langley (remote), James Ford (remote), Jim Handy, Leigh Albert, Norm Higgins, Tom Keller, Tori Kornfield

Directors Absent
None

Guests Present
Amy Allen, Lana Ewing (remote), Susan Whipkey (remote)

I. Opening Items

A. Record Attendance

B. Call the Meeting to Order

Norm Higgins called a meeting of the board of directors of Maine Charter School Commission to order on Tuesday Mar 12, 2024 at 1:03 PM.

C. To Consider the Approval of the 2/13/24 Commission Meeting

Jim Handy made a motion to approve the minutes from Monthly Commission Meeting on 02-13-24.
Tori Kornfield seconded the motion.
Tori noted a correction to spelling on page 8. "Know" should be changed to "No"
The board **VOTED** to approve the motion.

Roll Call

Tom Keller	Aye
Tori Kornfield	Aye
Leigh Albert	Aye
Norm Higgins	Aye
Brian Langley	Absent
Jim Handy	Aye
James Ford	Aye

II. Comments from Commission Chair

A. Comments

Norm reported the following:

- Thanked Baxter for hosting and asked Thorn Dickinson, Baxter Board Chair, and Ruth Dean, Baxter Board Vice-Chair to introduce themselves.
- Attended Ecology Learning Center's recent Open House for its new performance arts facility. Jim Handy and Lana Ewing were also in attendance.

- He and Lana have begun to have have meetings with educational and business leaders across the state to share the mission of the Maine Charter School Commission and to discuss any needs that public charter schools might be able to address.
- There is some thought about canceling the Commission's July meeting. The one order of business that would be affected by that decision would be the Election of Commission Officers. Lana will discuss further later in the agenda.

Tom asked if the Education & Cultural Affairs Committee has rescheduled the Commission's presentation of the SY2022-23 Annual Report to the Commissioner. Norm shared that there is nothing currently scheduled.

III. Additions or Adjustments to the Agenda

A. Additions/Adjustments

None

IV. Committee Reports

A. School Performance Committee

Tori Kornfield - Chair, School Performance Committee - reported on the work being done by the Committee.

B. Finance Committee

Leigh Weisenburger Albert - Chair, Finance Committee - reported on the work being done by the Committee.

C. Executive Committee

Norm Higgins - Chair, Executive Committee - reported on the work being done by the Committee.

V. Public Comment*

A. Public Comment

Ruth Dean - Vice Chair, Baxter Academy Governing Board - introduced the Baxter Charter Alliance student group who shared the following:

- Their purpose is to clarify misinformation and promote charter schools.
- Met with students from Maine Arts Academy last Friday.

- Would like to see the 10th public charter school in an area not currently populated with a school.

Travis Works - Executive Director, Community Regional Charter School:

- A memorial scholarship fund for a 2021 graduate who recently passed away has been established. Travis shared that this student "embodied what dual enrollment meant".
- The board is currently looking at enrollment and facilities needs. They currently operate in three separate buildings (campuses) and are in the early stages of thinking through what a single building would like like and have conversations with both Highmark and Raymond James. They will continue to report progress to the Commission.

Sherry Gilbert - Board President, Maine Arts Academy:

- Reported that their reading scores on the Through-Year Assessment are higher than other high schools in their catchment area.
- They recognize that their math scores need to improve and have hired another math teacher that will begin work soon.

VI. Presentations

A. Baxter Academy for Technology and Science (Anna Klein-Christie)

Anna Klein-Christie - Executive Director, Baxter Academy for Technology and Science

- Baxter enrolls students from across a 25-mile catchment area.
- They administer IXL Math for all incoming freshmen to get a sense of their academic needs and to determine what supports might be needed.
- This years freshman class has 110 students and the senior class has 85 students. The goal is 390 total students for SY2024-25 keeping the freshman class closer to 100 as "110 is getting too large".
- Space is an issue and the school is currently looking at creative solutions to the problem. One idea is to increase students learning opportunities by getting them out of the building.
- Transportation is a barrier to educational opportunities as well as enrollment.
- GPA has improved to 3.37.
- College acceptance as of March 9th is 86%.
- Multi-language students have a 100% success rate and are passing their classes with a current GPA of 3.3.
- The Chess Team are the Maine Scholastic Champions for 2024. The school is offering a chess class this year and there are 16 students enrolled.
- Historically, the Robotics Team has been extremely successful and the banners around the school speak to the tie-in this has with the school's engineering program.

- Zak Cyr, a Baxter student, won a Congressional Art Award. His work will be showcased in Washington, DC.
- The Maine Scholastic Art Show was held last week and Baxter Academy students won 20 awards.
- The number of "partner organizations" who provide internships and mentorships to Baxter students speaks to the value the community places on the education provided at Baxter.
- The funding received through state allocations is insufficient and the school is constantly looking for ways to expand its funding.

B. CountMeIn! (Jess Anderson)

CountMeIn! is an organization that is looking at absenteeism trends in Maine schools and provides professional development to help schools reduce chronic absenteeism. Jess Anderson, Executive Director, shared the following:

- A student is chronically absent when they miss 10% or more of enrolled school days for any reason. If a student misses 2 days a month, this corresponds to missing 1 month of school.
- During the 2022-2023 school year, 25.5% of all students in Maine were chronically absent.
- A statute was recently passed that requires a school with a chronic absenteeism rate greater than 10% to have an attendance review team in place. Only 17 Maine schools reported chronic absentee rates less than 10%.
- Students who are chronically absent have lower NWEA scores than students that aren't.
- The first strategy to address chronic absenteeism is to implement an early warning system.
    - Understand your data.
    - Set a threshold for flagging students who are in danger of becoming chronically absent. For example, students who miss 2-4 days in September are likely to be chronically absent for the remainder of the school year.
    - Review data consistently.
    - Develop interventions to address barriers.
- Students most likely to be impacted by chronic absenteeism are youth:
    - from low-income backgrounds;
    - of color;
    - who have experienced trauma;
    - with disabilities;
    - who have experienced homelessness;
    - who have been in contact with the juvenile justice system.
- Strategy two is to dig into the data and think about ways to promote attendance.
- CountMEIn! has supported over 100 schools in Maine and encourages each of them to work collaboratively with families and to form positive partnerships within their communities to overcome attendance barriers.

- Schools using CountMeIn! last year reported improvements three times the state average.
- Jess shared the following resource - www.attendanceworks.com.

Commission Member questions:
Tori asked if there are specific things or a compilation of things to work on to change chronic absenteeism. Jess noted she uses a rubric of 15 items and the items to work on are never just one thing. Tori asked if absenteeism expands as grades go up. Jess noted the graph looks like a Nike "swoosh" across grade levels. Grades K-3 rates are high and 10-12 rates are high.
Norm asked about Jess's capacity to coach additional schools next year. Jess responded she could take on 6-7 schools but is working to pilot a different cohort model of coaching that would have more continuity across schools. She has connected with some charter schools already who have had free consultations.

After Jess's presentation, Norm discussed the cost of this service and impacts on the budget. The Commission is keeping its attention on absenteeism, and he wondered how the Commission can support the schools in their work to address the problems. He suggested the Commission should think about what resources can be brought to the schools. If there are additional funds, this might be an opportunity. Tori commented that the School Performance Committee cares about this issue because it impacts math performance tied to sequential, building block instruction. Norm asked Lana to explore opportunities for the Commission to support schools in their work on chronic absenteeism before the budget is finalized. Leigh further suggested it may be helpful to partner with public schools in the area too.

VII. Executive Director/Commission Staff Report

A. School Updates

Lana reported the following:

- On March 10th, she attended the Grand Opening of Ecology Learning Center's new facility. Norm and Jim were also in attendance.
- Maine Arts Academy has received an outdoor learning initiatives grant from the Maine DOE in the amount of $54,524. The grant combines biking with photography and is specifically targeted for students who would not normally get outdoors. The program will run for 6 weeks during the summer.
- Maine Academy of Natural Sciences is entering their spring intensives. 350 gallons of sap has been collected for a maple sugaring event scheduled for March 24th from 12:00-3:00pm. They have also received an outdoor learning initiative grant in the amount of $121,000.
- Community Regional Charter School recently held a "Rockapella Concert" that showcased the talents of many of its students. These artistic opportunities are

made available through introductory electives and the school encourages students interested in the arts to consider transferring to Maine Arts Academy.

B. Organizational Updates

Lana reported on the following:

- We have hired a full-time Administrative Assistant. Her name is Sue Whipkey and her first official day will be on Wednesday, March 12th.
- The Maine DOE recently released results from the Spring 2023 Through-Year Assessment and those results are included in the board packet. The data is challenging and the takeaways are:
    - State results for 2023 are lower than 2022.
    - ACADIA is above average state expectations in both ELA and Math.
    - The ELA results are better than Math and are more similar to comparisons in 2022.
    - 5 charter schools are above and 3 are below the state average in ELA similar to 2022
    - MeANS improved from 2022 to 2023 in ELA.
    - Math is an area of concern as all charters, except ACADIA, are below state averages.
    - The two virtual schools are data outliers with their Math scores. There is a real decline in scores which are not consistent with results from other assessments they're giving, NWEA MAP, for example.
    - Blueprint for math assessment was changed for 8th graders. There is a catch-up in instruction and aligning the curriculum.
    - Subgroup trends are comparative to the all student results. FSAS is a bright spot in the data results because they have a free and reduced lunch program that helps produce comparatively stronger results.
    - Growth data - For the two schools with growth data, both are below in proficiency in Math and ELA. But they have strong growth data meeting and exceeding growth in all categories.
    - Commission member questions -
        - Tori requested a copy of Lana's overall summary.
        - Leigh asked if there has been an analysis done between chronic absenteeism and assessment results and are the assessment results in the performance framework. Lana reported that some of the schools have done this analysis, but not all and that assessment results are in the performance framework.
- Strategic Planning
    - The Commission is in its final year of the current 3-Year Strategic Plan so it's the right time to be looking at revisions.
    - A copy of the current plan along with a tracker of the progress on each of the goals is included in the board packet.
    - A summary of the progress made on the current plan is as follows:

        - Strategic Priority #1: Increase student achievement and social-emotional well-being: achieved or partially achieved those goals;
        - Strategic Priority #2: Create the conditions for sustained excellence: achieved or partially achieved those goals;
        - Strategic Priority #3: Develop effective governing boards: achieved goals related to professional development and stalled goals related to providing materials for recruitment strategies and orientation of new board members;
        - Strategic Priority #4: Foster collaborative innovation: achieved or partially achieved those goals;
        - Strategic Priority #5: Engage and activate stakeholders: achieved or partially achieved those goals except website design.
    - Lana proposed a PD session on the morning of April 9th (before the monthly Commission Meeting) to review the categories and goals in the plan.
- July Commission Meeting - We are considering canceling the July Commission Meeting. If we do this, the Election of Commission Officers will be moved to the August Meeting. An ad-hoc nominating committee needs to be formed in May or June. Will continue to discuss internally, but will ask for Commission approval to cancel the July meeting in June.
- Internal Policy Review - Staff will tackle this project during the summer.
- Mid-Year Meetings have all been completed. Reports will be shared with the School Performance Committee and the full Commission in April.
- Panorama Surveys will launch on 3/25 and run through the end of the school year. Amy is working with school leaders to get the teacher and student rosters ready. Norm would like this information included in the presentation to the EDU Committee.
- Monthly School Leaders Meetings - The next 3 scheduled meetings will have an element of PD incorporated as follows:
    - FundEd provides fundraising support to schools and has raised approximately $100 million for charter schools across the country in the 6 years they've been in business.
    - BuyQ is an organization that operates group purchasing for charter schools and has found areas where the charter schools may be able to save money.
    - Mike Mizzoni from BoardOnTrack will give an overview of the platform.
- To continue to raise awareness of charter schools in Maine and nationally, Lana will:
    - Attend the National Charter School Institute's A-GAME Convening in Chicago in May and has submitted a proposal for a "fireside chat" about balancing authorizer support and accountability for charter schools.
    - Attend the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools annual conference in Boston in late June/early July.
    - Be interviewed by the President of BuyQ who hosts a podcast - "The Charter School ...". Lana will send it out next week.

C.

Media Updates

One article related to chronic absenteeism was shared in the board packet.

D. New Charter School

- The first DRAFT New School Application Information Session was held last week and was attended by four (4) entities who may be interested in opening a public charter school:
  - A foreign language school.
  - A Career and Technical Education (CTE) school that may be interested in converting to a charter school.
  - A former applicant interested in reapplying.
  - A representative from BES, an organization that supports developing school leaders and helps through the application process.
- There were questions about start-up funding. Lana is asking Joe Drago for input.
- Met with a representative yesterday who is interested in opening a Wabanaki school.
- There will be an information session every month until interest is done.

VIII. Unfinished Business

A. Unfinished Business

None

IX. New Business Requiring Approval and/or Acceptance

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

- Leigh Albert made a motion to Approve Fiddlehead's Request for Funds for Revisioning Project
- Brian Langley seconded the motion
- Discussion followed:
- Tori is not happy that only one school is receiving 1/2 the funds that are set aside in the budget for innovation. She is also concerned that the request doesn't go directly to students.

Jim "has some anxiety" over giving additional funds to one school and believes the fund should be directed towards short-term activities rather than on-going expenses. He doesn't think revisioning fits within the innovation fund. Lana commented that there is some precedence for the Commission funding this type of expense, so this particular request is not out of bounds. Jim may support a smaller amount of funding to leave room for other requests.

- Tori would rather see workshops from CountMEIn
- History of supporting board development and strategic planning
- Norm views the fund as one being used for the initial costs of a program that directly benefits students. He doesn't question how former Commission members used the funds, but believes this is an opportunity for the current Board to redefine how to use the funds. If more time is needed to define this, that is okay.
- Tom asked how this might help the other schools. Can they send a person or get materials? He stated it's a lot of money for just one school and the Board should develop criteria on how these funds are used. He suggested tabling the motion until the next meeting.
- Jim asked if tabling would give time to establish criteria for use of the funds for this round? Lana suggested because this is late in the year, this change would be appropriate for the new fiscal year, starting in August. New criteria for can be developed, funding levels can be reviewed as part of the FY25 budget, and a communication strategy for schools can be developed.
- James - is there a process for the money? Maybe there's an opportunity for schools to collaborate?
- $6,000 requested is 1/2 of the proposal
- Leigh - There is little time left in the fiscal year. We have an opportunity to establish criteria.
- Norm - We have an obligation to give Fiddlehead a "yes" or "no" from this meeting. We need to provide general guidance - how much money, etc. Let the school know we'll vote next month.

Tom Keller made a motion to table the request and consider at the next Board meeting.
Tori Kornfield seconded the motion.
Would the tabling provide time to establish criteria for the grants? Lana informed the board that we have 3 more months left in the year and 3 opportunities for schools to present proposals for these funds and suggested that criteria be established for next year along with the funding level and communication to schools about the funds. Lana also reminded the Board that there is a time crunch for Fiddlehead on this proposal and that $6000 request is half of the amount available.
Norm reminded the Board that we need to give an answer to Fiddl
The board **VOTED** unanimously to approve the motion.

Roll Call

Leigh Albert	Aye
Brian Langley	Aye
James Ford	Aye
Norm Higgins	Aye
Tom Keller	Aye
Tori Kornfield	Aye
Jim Handy	Aye

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

A. New Governing Board Members

- *Baxter Academy for Technology and Science (Kathleen DeSilva)*
- *Baxter Academy for Technology and Science (April Theberge)*

B. Board Member Resignations

None

C. Board Member Term Outs

None

XI. Next Month's Topics

A. Next Month's Topics

- Mid-Year Meeting Reports
- Joe Drago will Present on School Funding and ED279s

XII. Announcements

A. Important Dates

Graduation Ceremonies:

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

B. Next Regular Business Meeting

April 9, 2024 - Cross Office Building, Room #103, Augusta

XIII. Closing Items

A. Adjourn Meeting

There being no further business to be transacted, and upon motion duly made, seconded and approved, the meeting was adjourned at 4:02 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,
Norm Higgins

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