APPROVED

Maine Charter School Commission

Minutes

Monthly Commission Meeting

Date and Time
Tuesday April 9, 2024 at 1:00 PM

Location
Room #103, Cross Office Building, 111 Sewall Street, Augusta 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 Sue Whipkey at (207)816-2187 or susan.whipkey@maine.gov.

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

Directors Absent
Brian Langley

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

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 Apr 9, 2024 at 1:03 PM.

II. Comments from Commission Chair

A. Comments

- Norm asked Commission member, Tom Keller, to read the Commission's mission and vision statements.

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 that due to scheduling challenges the Committee was unable to meet in April.

C. Executive Committee

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

V. Public Comment*

A. Public Comment

Bill Doughty - Board Chair, Fiddlehead School of Arts & Sciences - spoke to the challenges of interpreting both NWEA outcomes and Panorama survey results as the "norms" are pre-pandemic.

VI. Presentations

A. Joe Drago - 279s

Joe shared his presentation "ED279 Refresher" - Highlights are:

- The ED279 is the report that shows how Maine schools are funded. It is based on equitable opportunity and adequacy, is cost driven and relies on audited data gleaned from high performing, cost effective charters and school units.
- Joe noted that if the schools have questions about their funding, Paula Gravelle at the Maine DOE will be happy to discuss.
- Current stressors on school funding include inflation, facilities at limits, competition for teachers, political climate shifts, weather extremes and scarcity of non-govt funders.
- **Current strengths of fiscal management include the** capture of leading indicators, financial performance reporting and multi-year planning, competitive teacher offers, an active search for non-gov't funders, experienced Commission.
- Types of funding for schools are 1) Basic Counts (per student EPS based on home district); 2) Weighted Counts (additional funding for certain characteristics such as disadvantaged and multilingual students; 3) Targeted Funds for Assessments and Technology; 4) Spec Ed Allocation based on State Rules; and 5) Transportation Allocation (annual rate per student)
- ACADIA Academy Funding Calculation example.
- The expected EPS Avg for FY25 Charter Schools is $8,186 about $100 less than in FY24.
- Paula Gravelle at the Maine DOE has a draft PowerPoint for Maine Charter School funding calculations which includes the applicable Maine law.
- The funding program is reviewed every three years. Charter schools get about 2% or $33M of the state budget.

Discussion / Questions / Comments

- Fundraising - Leigh asked if the scarcity of non-governmental funders is unique to Maine? Joe responded no, but there is philanthropy in larger cities for charter schools that is absent in Maine. Lana noted that Maine has an enrollment cap that other state's do not. Leigh commented that in Lewiston fundraising efforts may be impacted by the efforts related to the Lewiston shooting tragedy. Norm questioned whether the commission could assist with fundraising activities like grant writing, management, etc. and asked whether there are National Charter School resources available to schools. Lana relayed the May School Leader's Meeting will be devoted to a Fund Ed presentation. This organization has raised over $100M for Charter Schools in the past 6 years and is offering a pro-bono hour on best practices.
- Student Counts - Tori raised the issue of the timing of student counts and its impacts on the EPS amounts.
- Transportation - Norm asked if charter schools are eligible for any state funding of bus purchases. Joe stated the only state funding for transportation is the $900 per student. Joe explained this is a management issue for school. The schools need to find some other funding.
- Facilities - Norm asked if charter schools are eligible for construction funding or the revolving fund. Joe says no because although not expressly prohibited, it is not written into law that it is available to them.
- Charter School Funding is all state funding (100% of EPS model amount); no local funding goes to charter schools.
- Federal Funds - Tom asked if the schools receive Federal funds. Joe answered yes, the schools get them on their own. The amounts are added to the Basic EPS amounts.

VII. Executive Director/Commission Staff Report

A. School Updates

Lana provided the following updates:

- Maine Connections Academy was awarded an Outdoor Learning Initiative Grant (MOLI) for summer student opportunities. They have 4 options ranging from a 1 day ropes course/team building time to a 5-day overnight summer camp experience. This is part of the social engagement goal that is part of the Performance Framework. Tori expressed her concern it's a small % of kids who take advantage of this. Her concern is the social isolation they experience. Lana noted that we will get the % of kids participating.
- Maine Arts Academy, Healthy Communities of the Capital Area, and Downtown Augusta all co-sponsored an Art Walk on Saturday to highlight mental health through Downtown Augusta and Maine Arts Rock Music Ensemble performed. They also invited other area public schools to submit art so this is a collaboration

between Maine Arts as a charter and 3 other public districts in Kennebec County. The art work will be displayed in about 15 businesses downtown.

- Baxter Academy for Technology and Science students won a robotics competition at the Maine Math State Math Competition. Received a Maine Outdoor Learning (MOLI) grant for 4 weeks of stem programming for new Americans/under-represented populations. Programming will be STEM focused through Ocean Sustainability/AI in the Sky/Photography in our community/Hiking expeditions. Environmental Immersion program travelled up to see the Eclipse. A rotating group of @60 students are now taking regular trips into nature -hiking ranges from Mackworth Island to much more ambitious efforts. It is our work taking a leadership role in making a practical connection between our student's curriculum and the needs of the planet.

B. Organizational Updates

Lana provided the following updates:

- The Finance Committee and staff, with Joe's support, are working on the FY25 budget to be presented and voted on at the May meeting. The Executive Committee has been briefed and provided feedback. A highlight of the budget is a proposed increase in the Innovation Funds from $20K in the current budget to $40K. The Performance Committee has noted areas of growth that schools could have on chronic absenteeism, math or early literacy. Rather than direct programming at the Board Level, the use of these funds can encourage the schools to create their own programming to impact growth in these areas. Leigh commented that in a future way of looking at the innovation fund, the fiddlehead request for strategic planning would be forecasted in a three-year operating budget.
- Mid-Year Reports - From January through March, the Staff met with each school for trends and had candid conversations with the schools.
    - Summary
        - ELA - 5 of 9 schools are outperforming the state average for at or above expectations.
        - Math is subject of concern; Only 1 of 9 schools is outperforming state averages (Acadia).
        - Chronic absenteeism is improving in every school, but still not meeting the performance framework expectations. Tori noted the relationship between chronic absenteeism and math scores because of the building block nature of math unit instruction.
        - Graduation rate - All schools are expected to meet or exceed the graduation rate expectation of the framework. This is improved from past years.

        - The financials look good. Two schools are waiting on audit results, but the others show no material deficiencies.
        - Enrollment is good. High re-enrollment and larger enrollment than last year in all schools except Acadia which is capped because of the facility limitations.
        - Facilities space - All the schools need for more space.
    - State Board of Education Committee - Rescheduled meeting later this spring for the MCSC presentation.
    - Panorama Surveys - The window has been launched and runs from March 25 to June 13. Lana extended thanks to Amy.
    - Strategic Planning Session - The session will be held after the shortened May Board Meeting. The Board will meet with Naomi from NCSI from 2:30 to 4:30. The Mission and Vision statements will be reviewed. School boards can convene on May 14 with Naomi as well.
    - June Board Meeting - The meeting will be held at the Ecology Learning Center on June 11 as they are going into renewal next year.
    - 5 minute break at 2:44
    - Count Me In - Lana thanked Jess Anderson for her Commission presentation on chronic absenteeism last month and James who made the introduction. Jess is able to offer training for schools next year where they would meet for an hour of PD monthly to discuss their chronic absenteeism and solve the problems together. Jess would provide best practices from her work experience. The funds for this expense are in the proposed budget and the cost is reasonable.

C. Media Updates

D. New Charter School

Norm and Lana have had a series of meetings with parties who may be interested in submitting a new school application. Lana expects a "robust and competitive application process" and reminded the Commission that the application will open on July 1st and due in February 2025.

Norm stated that the role of the Commission Chair is "to open doors" while the role of the Executive Director "is to manage the portfolio".

Leigh asked if there is a rubric for assessing completed applications. Lana responded that there is one available that needs a few revisions to match the application itself. She also shared that a review team will be formed to evaluate the applications and that training on how to evaluate will likely be provided by David Hartman.

VIII. Unfinished Business

A.

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

Tori Kornfield made a motion to Approve Fiddlehead School of Arts & Sciences' Request for Funds for Revisioning Project.
Leigh Albert seconded the motion.
Jim Handy does not find the proposal innovative and believes the expense should be part of the school's operating budget.
The board **VOTED** to approve the motion.

Roll Call

Leigh Albert	Aye
Jim Handy	No
Brian Langley	Absent
James Ford	Aye
Norm Higgins	Aye
Tori Kornfield	Aye
Tom Keller	Aye

IX. New Business Requiring Approval and/or Acceptance

A. To Consider the Approval of Ecology Learning Center's Fund Request for Student-Led Arts Initiatives

Tori Kornfield made a motion to accept the Ecology Learning Center's fund request for student-led arts initiatives.
Leigh Albert seconded the motion.
Jim Handy opposes the motion for the same reason he opposed the Fiddlehead request. This is an operational expense.
The board **VOTED** to approve the motion.

Roll Call

Brian Langley	Absent
Jim Handy	No
Tori Kornfield	Aye
Norm Higgins	Aye
Tom Keller	Aye
James Ford	Aye

B. To Consider Changing the Independent Third Party Evaluation Annual Requirement from Every Year to Twice in 5 Years (Year 2 and Year 4 of a Charter Term)

Jim Handy made a motion to approve changing the independent third-party evaluation annual requirement from every year to twice in five years (Year 2 and Year 4 of the Charter Term).
Tori Kornfield seconded the motion.
The board **VOTED** to approve the motion.

Roll Call

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

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

A. New Governing Board Members

None

B. Board Member Resignations

None

C. Board Member Term Outs

None

XI. Next Month's Topics

A. Next Month's Topics

- Consideration of the Commission's FY25 Budget
- Ad-Hoc Nominating Committee for Election of Officers

B. June Meeting Topics

- The June meeting will be held at the Ecology Learning Center.
- Executive Session for Annual Executive Director Evaluation
- Consider the Cancellation of the July Commission Meeting

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)*

Norm shared that attendance at graduation ceremonies is encouraged and that travel expenses and per diem will be paid.

B. Next Regular Business Meeting

May 14, 2024 at 1pm via Zoom or in person at 111 Sewall Street, Augusta, ME. Room 103.

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 3:03 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,
Norm Higgins

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* 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.