APPROVED

Maine Charter School Commission

Minutes

Monthly Commission Meeting

Date and Time
Tuesday December 10, 2024 at 1:00 PM

Location
Room #103, Cross Office Building, 111 Sewall Street, Augusta or via Zoom

The **Vision** of the Maine Charter School Commission is that ***"Innovative public charter schools will provide Maine students with an equitable opportunity for an excellent education where students are valued, supported and challenged."***

The **Mission** of the Maine Charter School Commission is ***"To authorize, monitor and support innovative public charter schools that provide a dynamic, high-quality 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

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

Directors Absent
None

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 Dec 10, 2024 at 1:06 PM.
Tom read the Mission and Vision statements.

C. To Consider the Approval of the 11/12/24 Commission Meeting Minutes

Jim Handy made a motion to approve the minutes from the Monthly Commission Meeting on 11-12-24.
Tori Kornfield seconded the motion.
The board **VOTED** unanimously to approve the motion.

Roll Call

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

II. Comments from Commission Chair

A. Comments

Norm thanked the members for creating an environment where honest conversations can be held as evidenced by the participation in the Commission Strategic Planning Meeting.

In the upcoming legislative session, Norm anticipates conversation around how the Federal Government will use finances to advocate its agenda. At the state level, school choice will be discussed. The Commission will monitor the impacts on Charter Schools.

III. Additions or Adjustments to the Agenda

A. Additions/Adjustments

None

IV. Committee Reports

A. School Performance Committee

Tori reported the following:

- The Committee discussed Fiddlehead's request to use its Yurt as classroom space and recommended the school revise and reconsider the request.
- The Committee reviewed demographic breakdowns and discussed data anomalies among the schools regarding gender and school populations representative of the local community.

B. Finance Committee

Brian reported the Committee reviewed the following:

- The Fiddlehead Yurt proposal withdrawal.
- SY24-25 Enrollment Data with a slight increase in student counts and higher percentage of economically disadvantaged students and students with IEPs.
- 1st Quarter Financial Metrics for Schools with overall positive results and continued monitoring of those with high-risk scores.
- The financial order requesting $118,000 from carryover funds - Committee approved.

Tom suggested the committee seek cross school professional development funding for innovative instruction modes.

C. Executive Committee

Norm reported the Committee discussed potential legislation to:

- amend the structure of Commission operations to allow the option to operate more independently as a state agency.
- expand enrollment cap on virtual schools.

The Commission will monitor upcoming legislation and support if desired.

V. Public Comment*

A. Public Comment

Jana Lapointe clarified that the potential legislation concerning the enrollment cap for virtual schools is considered to allow a 10% over / underway leeway.

Lana thanked Matt Newburg, the executive director at Maine Academy of Natural Sciences as he steps down for a new position. Matt reported that Evan Coleman and Pat Heyman will serve as school leaders on an interim basis until a search to start in January concludes.

Heather King shared that Maine Arts Academy is holding a free community dinner served at their school on Christmas Eve at noon. Recently, the students participated in a full theater performance and a dance performance at UMA and are working on a 3-D architectural rendering of the Cushnoc Brewery building in downtown Augusta for display there. The students visited seven colleges in November.

For Community Regional Charter School, building principal Susan Muzzy reported that 11 staff members participated in a conference in Boston and are incorporating items learned within the school. Elizabeth Firnkes shared a tool being used at Overman Academy to enhance mathematics skills, Pathways to Careers.

Anna Klein Christie reported Baxter's Chess team participated in a National Championship in D.C. and was on Maine Public Broadcasting on Friday.

VI. Presentation(s)

A. Maine Virtual Academy's Independent Third Party Evaluation

Dr. Mary Madden presented Maine Virtual Academy's 3rd Party Evaluation for SY23-24. The evaluation explored experiences of 16 newly enrolled students and their parent/caregiver by holding two interviews during the school year. The interviews were held first early in the year to learn about the choice to come to MeVA and then towards the end of the year.

Highlights and challenges include the following:

- Student needs assessments are thorough.
- Video recording of lessons is helpful.
- Weekly newsletters are informative.
- Offering college classes is important.
- Teachers and staff respond quickly to questions.
- Making peer connections is challenging.
- Academic Progress almost always went up from previous school experiences.

Recommendations include the following:

- Continue to provide recordings of lessons and quickly respond to questions
- Provide public school guidance counselors with information on MeVA.
- Clarify in-person/social opportunities are limited. Virtual experience is emphasized over in-person as the wide geographic area is a barrier to in-person meetings.

VII. Executive Director/Commission Staff Report

A. School Updates

Lana reported the following:

Maine Arts Academy has received grants recently.

- Kennebec Savings Bank Catalyst grant for $30,000 to pay for auditorium seating and a collaborative traveling theater production with Augusta's Colonial Theater.
- Whole Foods grant for $3,500 to pay for food warmers and other kitchen equipment.

Maine Arts Academy was on a segment of the Maine Business Show which highlighted what an arts education looks like for students in Maine.
Tom suggested a letter be sent thanking Kennebec Savings Bank for their partnership.

B. Organizational Updates

Lana reported the following:

- Binders with Maine Charter School Commission documents were provided to the Commissioners.

- School Board members and leaders attended a professional development session yesterday. They provided feedback on the Commission's Strategic Plan and reviewed their own short-term goals.
- Lana graduated from the Georgetown course on educational finance, Edunomics.
- Commissioner Makin will attend the January Commission meeting to review and ask questions on Annual Report.
- Mid-year meetings with all the schools will take place in January.

C. Media Updates

VIII. Monthly School Portfolio/Data Report

A. Student Enrollments and Demographic Data Breakdowns

Amy presented the Enrollment Data as of 10/1 with the following highlights:

- The total charter school student number increased since last year but is less than 2% of total Maine students.
- Most schools are meeting the contracted enrollments.
- Students from 143 Maine districts and 300 cities, towns or unorganized territories are enrolled.
- 22.88% of students have an IEP and 44.31% are economically disadvantaged. Both scores are higher than currently published state averages.
- Portfolio wide, gender and race breakdowns are comparable to the statewide breakdown, but not in all individual school communities.
- Students speak 19 different languages, excluding English.

IX. New Business Requiring Approval and/or Acceptance

A. To Consider Ecology Learning Center's Request to Amend Bylaws

Jim Handy made a motion to approve the Ecology Learning Center's amendments to its bylaws.
Tori Kornfield seconded the motion.
The board **VOTED** unanimously to approve the motion.

Roll Call
Tom Keller Aye

Roll Call

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

B. To Consider Amending 20-A MRSA, §2405 Sub-§8 To Establish the Commission as a Body Corporate and Politic and a Public Instrumentality of the State

Jim Handy made a motion to pursue legislation amending 20-A MRSA to establish the Commission as a Body corporate and Politic and a Public Instrumentality of the State.
Tori Kornfield seconded the motion.
Lana read the recommendation from the Department of Administrative Financial Services (DFAS) which she will send to Commission members. Under a new structure, legal representation, IT assistance and insurance coverage, physical storage and meeting space will be items to consider.
Missy O'Neal-Low from the DOE clarified there is no plan to change the make-up of the Board as part of this change.
The deadline to submit legislation is January 10th.

The board **VOTED** unanimously to approve the motion.

Roll Call

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

X. Announcements

A. Important Dates

February 13th is the deadline for new school applications. The review/approval process will be discussed in the January meeting.

B. Upcoming Business Meetings

XI. 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 2:51 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,
Norm Higgins

Documents used during the meeting

- Dashboard for FY25 11_27_24.pdf
- MeVA - Independent Third Party Evaluation September 2024.pdf
- 2024-25 School Enrollment Statistics.pdf
- School Year 2024-25 Demographic Data Breakdowns.pdf
- ELC Amendment for Change in School ByLaws (Part 1).pdf
- ELC Amendment for Change in School ByLaws (Part 2).pdf
- ELC Amendment for Change in School ByLaws (Part 3).pdf
- MeAA New Governing Board Member (April Hughes).pdf

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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.