APPROVED

Maine Charter School Commission

Minutes

Monthly Commission Meeting

Date and Time
Tuesday March 11, 2025 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 (remote), Jim Handy, Norm Higgins, Tom Keller, Tori Kornfield

Directors Absent
Leigh Albert

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 Mar 11, 2025 at 1:00 PM.
Tom read the Maine Charter School Commission Vision and Mission Statements.

C. To Consider the Approval of the 2/11/25 Commission Meeting Minutes

Jim Handy made a motion to approve the minutes from the Monthly Commission Meeting on 02-11-25.
Tom Keller seconded the motion.
The board **VOTED** to approve the motion.

Roll Call

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

II. Comments from Commission Chair

A. Comments

Norm reported the following:

- He met with the Chairs of the Education Committee to set a meeting for the MCSC to report to them. A date has not yet been set, but in the meantime, Lana has sent a written report to them.

- There is no news from the Governer's office on new Commission member appointments or reappointments as terms are expiring. Norm will follow-up.
- Legislation -
  - Gary Drinkwater's bill to increase the number of charter schools by one has been submitted with testimony on March 12.
  - The DFAS bill for the MCSC reorganization has not been referred to committee yet.
  - Norm will be testifying on a bill to address the academic needs of students enrolled in schools with less than 200 students.
  - Students from The Ecology Learning Center and Maine Academy of Natural Sciences will be testifying on March 13 for a bill before the Agricultural Committe concerning experiential learning.

III. Committee Reports

A. School Performance Committee

Tori reported the majority of the Committee's time was spent on the review of the Mid-Year Reports.

The Committee supported the decision to put the Community Regional Charter School on an improvement plan.

B. Finance Committee

Brian reported the following:

The Committee received an update from Travis Works on the CRCS facility expansion process.
Travis also reviewed their plan to address teacher turnover by raising teacher salaries to be competitive with area public schools.

The Committee discussed the benefits of the proposed MCSC organizational change in the bill sponsored by Senator Rafferty.

The Committee discussed preliminary FY26 Budget projections including strategic investments.

The Committee discussed the upcoming Hall of Flag Event to be held on May 29.

The Committee received the Mid-Year report on the Financial Health of the Schools from Sue and Joe. As a whole, the performance metrics declined year over year with the percentage of high-risk scores increasing.

The FY26 Budget review will be taken up in April with two scenarios. One with the current Commission structure and the second for the proposed new organization. Cost savings will be provided.

Tom asked if the Commission could accept grant funds from external agencies. Lana responded that we can and discussed the possibility of applying for the Charter School Program (CSP) grant for authorizers. This grant is generous but requires significant effort and typically is awarded to authorizers who are growing. Norm suggested exploring other grants that may be available to address issues that impact all of the schools in the portfolio.

C. Executive Committee

Norm reported the Executive Committee discussed current legislation impacting Charter Schools.

D. Ad-Hoc New School Application Review Committee

Lana provided an update on the review process for two applicants. She will post these applications to the public website. The proposals are:

- Wabanaki Hybrid High School - Reza Namin, Superintendent of Maine Indian Education. The school would begin in year one with 25 students in grades 9 and 10 and expand to grades 9 through 12 with 100 total students. The proposal combines a virtual and in-person educational model located in Indian Island, Old Town where traditional knowledge and contemporary skills are blended.
- Moxie School - Beth Rabbitt. This school is for grades 6-12 at full scale, beginning with grades 6-9 and 120 students in the first year and growing to grades 6-12 and 420 students over time. The model is designed to serve a traditionally underserved

student population with a focus on strong academics and partnerships within the tech/ career community for internship opportunities. The school will be in the Westbrook/Greater Portland area to start and expand over time with 2-4 satellite campuses located throughout the State.

Norm noted there were no application completion extensions granted. All applicant revision requests subsequent to the initial filing can be shared in meetings with the review team.

Leigh and Brian of the review committee along with Joe Drago, Norm and Lana participated in a training with David Hartman on completing an unbiased, thorough application review using a rubric. The review process is extensive with approximately 10-15 hours of review time per person for each application. This thorough review respects the work of the application parties. Lana expressed her thanks to the team.
This week the team will meet to compare the scores and come to consensus and prepare questions for the capacity interviews with the contenders. After the interviews the team will choose finalists with recommendations to the whole Commission in the April meeting. The Commission will then have the opportunity to interview the applicants and following there will be public hearings.

IV. Public Comment*

A. Public Comment

Travis Works of CRCS reported the school was awarded a $90K USDA distance learning grant through the Morrow Foundation. The focus is to support mental health and wellness programs for students, families and staff.

V. Executive Director/Commission Staff Report

A. School Updates

Lana gave the following school updates:

Maine Arts Academy - Music students performed at a school recital and dance students performed in collaboration with Colby College and the Portland Ballet Company at the Wesbrook Performing Arts Center. The dance students and visual arts students presented at the State House on Arts Advocacy Day with a table and live demonstrations.

On October 22 from 5-7, the school will hold a ribbon cutting ceremony for its expansion of the middle school auditorium and new dance studio. Norm will extend an invitation to Governer Mills on behalf of the school.

Baxter Academy is a finalist for the Education Innovation Award from Building Hope.

Maine Academy of Arts and Sciences extends an invitation to their school event on Maine Maple Sunday. It will be held on March 23rd from 9-12.

B. Organizational Updates

Lana provided a summary of the School Mid-Year Meeting Reports which were reviewed in detail by the School Performance Committee. Lana thanked Amy for writing the reports.
The meetings are held to review progress toward end of year goals with a focus on areas of improvement noted in last year's performance framework results. The portfolio is in a strong place and meeting participation was good.

Highlights:

- Demand is up with at least two schools holding a lottery this year for the first time.
- Performance is going in the right direction with higher NWEA & Accuplacer scores reported.
- Increase in students who are dual enrolled, taking college level courses.
- There are plans in place to improve school climate.
- Chronic absenteeism is still a challenge. The schools are working with Count Me In's Jess Anderson to analyze the data and work on lowering the absenteeism rate, but this is a difficult issue.
- Three FY24 audits are still outstanding.

Five Year Renewals - ACADIA and the Maine Arts Academy will be going through their charter renewal processes this spring into next fall. The staff will prepare four-year performance reports, and the school will prepare their renewal applications. In addition, site visits and focus groups with teachers, students and families will be held prior to formulating recommendations that the Commission will consider during its October meeting.

The Panorama survey for staff, teachers, students and families will be launched March 17th. Schools are encouraged to have good participation rates.

Reclassification of Commission structure - no bill language has been drafted and no hearing date has been set yet. The staff has been working with contacts within the state

to prepare for implementation should this pass. The reclassification will allow greater autonomy with operations, savings and flexibility.

CRCS is on a school improvement plan. Lana has worked with the school to set goals. There is improvement and an update will be provided this spring.

MeVA requested to change contract language around their hosting of social events to limit the events to virtual only rather than virtual and in-person as it is now. The school performance committee finds value in in-person meetings and did not recommend the change. The school is now planning live events, and the language will remain the same.

The staff has contracted with PLT Strategies to provide school document creation for the Hall of Flags. A one-page promotional document will be created for each school.
Jim suggested when getting a representative's and senator's consent to distribute the documents, have them stamped in advance before printing.
Tori suggested the schools make their monthly newsletters available.
Tom suggested to allow time for the students to move through the screening station at the Capital.

C. Media Updates

VI. Future Topics

A. Future Topics

A Nominating will need to be appointed for Commission officers.

In June, a decision whether to hold a July meeting will be made. Elections will be held in August.

VII. 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 2:24 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

Norm Higgins

Documents used during the meeting

- Dashboard for FY25 02_28_25.pdf
- 2025 Mid-Year Portfolio Summary.pdf
- 2025 Renewal Timeline - ACADIA Academy.pdf
- 2025 Renewal Timeline - Maine Arts Academy.pdf
- BUILDING HOPE ANNOUNCES 2025 IMPACT GRANT FINALISTS.pdf
- ACADIA New Governing Board Member (Aaron Landry).pdf
- ELC New Governing Board Member (Malcolm Campbell).pdf
- ELC New Governing Board Member (Ken Hahn).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.