APPROVED

Maine Charter School Commission

Minutes

Monthly Commission Meeting

Date and Time
Tuesday April 8, 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 Apr 8, 2025 at 1:00 PM.

C. To Consider the Approval of the 3/11/25 Commission Meeting Minutes

Jim Handy made a motion to approve the minutes from the Monthly Commission Meeting on 03-11-25.
Tori Kornfield seconded the motion.
The board **VOTED** to approve the motion.

Roll Call

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

II. Comments from Commission Chair

A. Comments

Norm expressed his appreciation for the work all are doing including:

- Mid-Year Reports
- The New School Application review
- Professional Development organized for the schools
- Public Relations and work with the Maine Charter School Alliance

Norm also reminded that in this challenging environment, it is important to stay focused on the Maine Charter School Commission's mission and vision statements. Jim read both statements.

Norm followed up with the Governer's office for a status on nominating Commission members and is waiting to receive an update. He also asked for volunteers to be on the officer nominating committee.

III. Additions or Adjustments to the Agenda

A. Additions/Adjustments

None

IV. Committee Reports

A. School Performance Committee

Tori reported the Committee reviewed the Moxie application and formulated interview questions for the in-person candidate interview.

Lana reviewed the next steps in the new school selection process.

Amy shared an update on two data projects that the Committee has found useful:

- Summary of School Unenrollment / Enrollment Statistics.
- Side by Side Comparison of Charter School vs Traditional Public-School Requirements.

Lana shared ideas for carryover spending in FY26 to discuss further next meeting.

B. Finance Committee

Brian Langley reported the Finance Committee:

Received updates from Travis Works on the Community Regional Charter School ("CRCS") facility planning project including efforts to secure a new site for a Fall 2027 opening.

Reviewed a draft FY26 budget proposal including a proposal under the existing structure and a proposal under a new Body Politic classification.

Reviewed carryover funds available for use in FY26. Lana provided spending options for discussion. These options will also be shared with the schools for feedback prior to a budget vote in May.

Discussed the creation of a reserve for any future legal expenses.

Reviewed School Finance Committee Reports.

C. Executive Committee

Norm reported the Committee reviewed the School Performance Committee and Finance Committee reports.
The Committee is watching for the proposed legislation of the change in Commission structure. This proposal is still at the revisors office, and it is pending.

D. Ad-Hoc New School Application Review Committee

Lana reported the team performed a detailed review of each application using a grading rubric and has held several meetings including an initial consensus meeting, capacity interviews with the applicants, and another consensus meeting based on all evidence available.
Based on this thorough review, the team is prepared to make a recommendation to advance a finalist. Lana clarified the recommendation is not an endorsement of the school at this time but is a recommendation to move the applicant forward to the next steps including a Commission interview and a public hearing.

Lana reported the Wabanaki Hybrid Charter High School applicant chose to withdraw and refine their application for future consideration. The vote to advance will apply to the Moxie School only.

Brian commented on the thoroughness of the process.

Tom spoke of the value of the consultants, David Hartman and Joe Drago, to the process.

V. Public Comment*

A. Public Comment

Elizabeth Frinkes from CRCS shared that the school held a Career Week where over 25 community members and family members representing a variety of careers spoke to students. This event is aligned with their new math program, Pathways to Careers.

Travis Works reported CRCS held a game night for families who don't normally have an opportunity to connect because of the school's geographic region.

VI. Presentation(s)

A. Anna Klein-Christie

Anna gave the Commission a presentation about her recent three-week trip to Kenya with Partners for World Health on their medical mission. The organization takes leftover medical supplies and distributes them in Africa, holds clinics and provides education. She participated in a research project while there and also gained insights around the Baxter student's wheelchair design project.
Teacher Sunny Stutzman and students Caleb Lyford and Lucas Parenteau also attended to research needs related to Baxter's wheelchair project. They visited a hospital, an orphanage and a school. The group set up clinics in a mining community and in a fishing village where Anna noted that wheelchairs are not common and necessary for disabled people to move about outside of their homes.
Lucas & Caleb will have a testing version of the wheelchair prototype available soon. The chair is designed with large front wheels and smaller back wheels. The goal is to make an inexpensive product that can be replicated easily with common, inexpensive materials. They noted the high need for wheelchairs in the hospital where they collaborated with local people to perfect the design.
Anna noted possible future collaborations on prosthetics and outreach to girls in STEM education.

VII. Executive Director/Commission Staff Report

A. School Updates

Lana gave the following school updates:

- Maine Arts Academy will be holding a "You Matter to ME" event in downtown Augusta on May 10th from 10 to 6. They will create displays and hold performances and invite other charter schools to participate.
- Maine Virtual Acadamy ("MeVA") has been named the #1 best charter school in Maine on the Niche Platform.
- MeVA is now National Collegiate Athletic Association ("NCAA") approved. Their academic program meets the requirements which allow students to be eligible to participate in collegiate sports. Melinda Browne clarified that they have students who are athletes, and this approval streamlines the process for their eligibility.
- Fiddlehead School of Arts & Sciences 2nd grade teacher, Sarah Giuliano has been nominated for Cumberland County teacher of the year.

B. Organizational Updates

Lana provided a timeline of the next steps in the New School Application Process:

- April 8 - the Commission will vote to advance the candidate in the process.
- April 17 - Commission Interviews
- April 30 or May 1 - Public Hearing
- Prior to May 13 Commission Meeting - Application Review Team Consensus Meeting
- May 13 - Application Approval Vote at Commission Meeting

Lana shared a Best Practices Guide for use during the Commission interview.

Brian asked about the appropriate weight to give to the Public Hearing testimony on the decision to approve a school's application. Lana responded that the testimony will be part of the entire body of evidence on which to base the decision using the established rubric.

Norm asked if the applicant could move forward with recommendations and conditions for approval. Lana explained that any approved application has built-in conditions that must be met throughout the time leading up to opening, enrollment and financial targets, for example. The Commission can also approve the school with additional conditions if desired.

Lana reported on the following other items:

- The Panorama Surveys have launched. Lana expressed thanks to Amy and the schools for collaborating, so the survey information collected is meaningful.
- The MCSC has contracted with PLT Strategies a national organization specializing in providing messaging support to charter schools. They will help schools share knowledge during the Hall of Flags event in May by creating an informational one pager for each school. In addition, they will create three one-pagers for the Commission including one with State of Maine Charter School facts, one describing charter school accountability and one about funding. All will be ready to distribute during the Hall of Flags. Tom suggested Amy's side-by-side requirements chart could be shared as well.
- Hall of Flags on May 29th - Students from the schools will be participating and ideas are coming together towards making this a good day for them.
- LD550 to support outdoor education with the Agricultural Committee - Lana thanked Pat Henyan from Maine Academy of Natural Sciences and Leza Packard

from the Ecology Learning Center who each brought students to testify and advocate for the importance of outdoor education on behalf of Maine students.

- Professional Development - The MCSC is partnering with the MDOE Office of Federal Programs to provide three virtual sessions for the charter schools. The first to be held on April 28 is with the ESEA Federal Programs team. The next two will cover assessments and child nutrition.
- FY26 Commission Budget - Next month the FY26 budget will be presented for consideration with two options, the current structure and the reorganized structure. Committees are currently reviewing ideas on reinvesting available monies for the schools. Lana will reach out to the schools for their ideas on needs, too.

C. Media Updates

- Maine Academy of Natural Sciences - Maple Sugar Sunday

VIII. New Business Requiring Approval and/or Acceptance

A. To Consider the Approval of the Review Team's Recommendation for the MOXIE Public School to be a Finalist to Open a New Charter School in the State of Maine.

Brian Langley made a motion to approve the review team's recommendation for the MOXIE Public School to be a finalist to open a new charter school in the State of Maine. Jim Handy seconded the motion.
Lana reminded the Commission this vote is not an endorsement of the school, but a vote to recommend that the school be moved forward to the final stages of the process including a commission interview and public hearing. The final vote will be in May.

Lana noted the Moxie School plans to launch in the greater Portland area with 120 students, 60 in grade 6 and 60 in grade 9 and to expand by 2 grade levels each year to reach 420 students in grades 6-12 at full capacity. Their application states that the school model uses "'intentional community-based partnerships and college and career workforce connections to reach Maine's aspirations that every Mainer has an unmatched quality of life and good paying job in a vibrant, sustainable, and environmentally responsible economy. To reach that goal every graduate will earn a workforce credential or an associate's degree."

Brian and Lana summarized the review team's findings and noted they identified four key strengths in the proposed school:

- Program design - The model was academically rigorous and supportive of a diverse, high need student population. Students could earn college or workforce credentials upon graduation.

- Operational detail - The application included comprehensive evidence of components required for the application.
- Team Capacity - The founding team includes well-respected people with expertise in educational, business, charter school and curriculum development communities.
- Potential Fundraising - The team is in the final stages of securing funding.

The team also identified three areas for the Commission to further explore during the Commission interview:

- Family and Community Engagement - Look for tangible evidence of engagement.
- Enrollment Analysis - Seek data on student demand in the Greater Portland and Greater Lewiston communities.
- Fundraising and Facilities - Are there contingency plans if expected funds are not available?

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

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

IX. Future Topics

A. Future Topics

May

- New School Vote
- Consider the Approval of Commission's FY26 Budget
- Ad-Hoc Nominating Committee Selection for Election of Officers

June

- To Consider the Need to Hold a Commission Meeting in July

X. Announcements

A. Important Dates

- 5/29/25 - Maine Charter School Hall of Flags beginning at 9 AM
- 10/22/25 - Maine Arts Academy Ribbon Cutting Ceremony from 5 PM - 7 PM

B. Upcoming Business Meetings

- **May 13, 2025** *(Cross Office Building, Room #103, Augusta) or Zoom*
- **June 10, 2025** *(Cross Office Building, Room #103, Augusta) or Zoom*

C. 2025 Graduation Dates

- Ecology Learning Center (June 5th at 5:00pm/MOFGA)
- Maine Arts Academy (June 1st at 12:00pm/Augusta Civic Center)

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 2:50 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,
Norm Higgins

Documents used during the meeting

- Dashboard for FY25 03_31_25.pdf
- Commission Interview Training_20250326.pdf
- centralmaine.com-Maple sugaring part of education at Maine Academy of Natural Sciences.pdf
- MeAA New Governing Board Member (Rachel White).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.