APPROVED

Maine Charter School Commission

Minutes

Monthly Commission Meeting

Date and Time
Tuesday June 10, 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
James Ford (remote), Jim Handy, 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 Jun 10, 2025 at 1:03 PM.
Tom read the Maine Charter School Commission Vision and Mission Statements

C. To Consider the Approval of the 4/8/25 Commission Meeting Minutes

Jim Handy made a motion to approve the minutes from Monthly Commission Meeting on 05-13-25.
Tori Kornfield seconded the motion.
The board **VOTED** to approve the motion.

Roll Call

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

II. Comments from Commission Chair

A. Comments

Norm reported there will be no renominations from the Governor's office by the end of June.
All Commissioners with expiring terms will serve until either renominated or replaced when the legislative session reconvenes in January.

III. Additions or Adjustments to the Agenda

A. Additions/Adjustments

None

IV. Committee Reports

A. School Performance Committee

Tori reported the Committee discussed the Request to Incur Debt Rubric and noted their recommendation for a two-step review process to provide the schools with any initial Commission concerns. Lana reported that language is added to the Process Overview which reads as follows:

"Initial Conversation Between the School and Commission Staff: Before a school submits a formal Request to Incur Debt, we recommend an initial meeting with Commission staff. This meeting provides an opportunity for a preliminary assessment of the school's financial, enrollment, and academic performance to gauge the likelihood of approval. Given that the criteria for approval are rigorous, this step helps schools determine whether moving forward is advisable before investing significant time and resources."

The Committee discussed the definitions of school and campus.

B. Finance Committee

Leigh reported that:

- All school audits have been received and are clean.
- There is a need across the portfolio to strengthen accounting skills and reporting.
- Joe and Lana will research outside sources and provide counsel and support.
- The committee discussed the Rubric to incur debt and the definition of school/campus.

Joe Drago reported that this is a good time to explore adding financial capacity within the schools and contact has been made with a financial services firm who will provide information about available services and pricing.

C. Executive Committee

Norm reported that most of the meeting time was spent on the same topics reported by the Finance and School Performance Committees.

D. Ad-Hoc Election of Officers Committee

Tori nominated Leigh Weisenburger Albert to serve as Commission Chair and Tom Keller to serve as Commission Vice Chair for the upcoming year.
Jim seconded the nominations.

The vote to elect the officers will take place during the August meeting.
Norm will open the meeting, the election will take place, and the new Chair will conduct the remainder of the meeting.

V. Public Comment*

A. Public Comment

None

VI. Executive Director/Commission Staff Report

A. School Updates

Lana attended graduations for Maine Arts Academy, Baxter Academy, and Maine Virtual Academy. Each school held memorable ceremonies unique to their missions.

Tom attended the Ecology Learning Center graduation where each graduate had dedicated time to speak about their school experiences.

Ecology Learning Center held end of year expeditions for juniors and seniors. Some traveled on the West Branch of the Penobscot and Moose River, some backpacked in the White Mountains and others spent time studying the landscape of Mount Blue State Park.

Governor Mills and Commissioner Makin visited Maine Academy of Natural Sciences ("MeANS") to celebrate the Maine Year of Youth in Agriculture. The pair enjoyed a meeting with school leadership and student ambassadors. Other students led a tour of the agricultural program visiting greenhouses, the farm and chicken coop, the bee apiary and the blacksmithing barn. They also shared that MeANS won the 2025 Envirothon State Championship. Pat Henyan reported that the visit was a great success.

Lana congratulated all the schools on a year well done and wished the staff a restful break.

Tom asked for information on the Baxter Innovation Fund Report. Lana summarized that the students created a wheelchair to be accessible in remote and rugged terrain made with easy to find materials. They formed partnerships with medical facilities in Africa who will benefit from the chairs and provide more opportunities for learning. The project tied

STEM to humanitarian programs and Tori noted it shows students that they can do something to help the world.

Graduation rate statistics will be available in August. Currently, post-secondary plans data isn't collected, but Lana explore finding this information.

B. Organizational Updates

Lana reported the following:

- The Hall of Flags event was held on May 29th. Lana thanked the seven participating schools. One-page informational brochures for each school and three Commission based brochures were available to hand out to the legislators. Group tours of the State House were provided for the students and a packet of information about Senate operations was distributed to them. Maine Arts Academy students performed in the Senate chamber and a number of students acted as honorary pages. Commission members discussed the importance of educating legislators about charter schools and noted distributing information during National Charter School Week or at the time the Kids Count Data Book is published would be appropriate. Schools should be encouraged to have meetings with their local representatives.
- The Commission sponsored a Strategic Planning Professional Development Workshop for Charter School Board Chairs and Leaders on May 22nd with Naomi Rubin-DeVeaux. Representatives of eight schools attended and provided positive feedback.
- ACADIA and Maine Arts Academy are currently in their renewal cycles. Each has completed required end of year documentation and Amy and Lana held end of year visits with the schools. Year Four performance reports will be provided to the schools by the end of June. A packet of evidence will be provided to the Commission before the October renewal vote.
- On May 14th, the Maine Department of Education National School Lunch Team provided a training presentation for school leaders. They covered the requirements, set up and maintenance of the school lunch programs.
- Panorama survey results will be available in August and Amy will be here in person.
- Lana thanked the Commission members for their time and energy this year.

Joe provided background on items included in the Request to Incur Debt Rubric and offered to answer any questions prior to the approval vote.

Lana provided a Legislative Update as follows:

- LD#282 to expand the cap on charter schools is closed. The Committee voted 'ought not to pass' unanimously on the original bill with no amendment.
- LD#854 for facility construction reform was pulled for this term.
- LD #1718 to allow the Commision to reorganize as a Public Instrumentality of the State has been passed to be enacted and will be finalized 90 days after the session ends.
- LD1571 to eliminate the uniquely qualified designation for charter school teachers beginning in August 2026 was passed. This bill brings certification requirements for charter school teachers in line with certification requirements for other public school teachers.

Tom explained that superintendents have proposed a pathway to ease certification for career changers or those pursuing different certifications. Approval by superintendents and MDOE will be required. The Commission will work with schools to understand the impact.

Tom inquired about upcoming training opportunities for the Commission. Lana will be in contact with Naomi Rubin-DeVeaux to plan next year's training sessions and asked the Commissioners for their input. Norm suggested team building training and a revisit of the mission and vision will be helpful in January, when new Commissioners are appointed. Tom would like to explore helping schools represent their local community. Leigh suggested guidance on the Commission role to support new schools (Moxie) will be needed.

C. Media Updates

VII. New Business Requiring Approval and/or Acceptance

A. To Consider Cancelling the July 8th Commission Meeting

Tori Kornfield made a motion to cancel the July 8th Commission Meeting.
Jim Handy seconded the motion.
The board **VOTED** to approve the motion.

Roll Call

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

B. To Consider the Approval of Maine Arts Academy's Bylaw Amendment Request

Jim Handy made a motion to approve Maine Arts Academy's Bylaw Amendment Request.
Tom Keller seconded the motion.
The school proposes to lower the maximum number of consecutive terms for Board Members consecutive terms to 3 from 4.
The board **VOTED** to approve the motion.

Roll Call

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

C. To Consider the Approval of the Request to Incur Debt Rubric

Leigh Albert made a motion to approve the Request to Incur Debt Rubric.
Jim Handy seconded the motion.
Norm noted the importance of having a basis for making an informed decision on issues of significant importance to schools.
Leigh added that the transparency the document provides is helpful and that it mirrors the Performance Framework making it a constructive tool for all parties.

The board **VOTED** to approve the motion.
Jim Handy made a motion to strike the word "recommend" and add "require" on page one of the document in the Process Overview section.
Tori Kornfield seconded the motion.
Tom proposed to change language as follows:
"We currently *require* an initial meeting with commission staff. This meeting provides an opportunity for a preliminary assessment of the school's financial enrollment and academic performance to gauge the likelihood of approval given that the criteria for approval are rigorous. This step helps schools determine whether moving forward is advisable before investing significant time and resources."
The board **VOTED** to approve the motion.

Roll Call

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

Jim Handy made a motion to adopt the policy as amended.
Tom Keller seconded the motion.
The board **VOTED** to approve the motion.

Roll Call

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

D. To Consider the Approval of the Policy Defining a School, Campus, and Facility

Jim Handy made a motion to adopt the policy defining a school, campus, and facility.
Tori Kornfield seconded the motion.
An approved charter contract equals a school which may have multiple campuses, but one Board and one Superintendent. If a school wants to open another campus, there must be an approval process. Currently the approval process for a school to open an additional campus involves the submission of multiple amendments This process will be streamlined for clarity.

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

Roll Call

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

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

A. New Governing Board Members

Maine Connections Academy - Nicole Peluso.

B. Board Member Resignations

C. Board Member Term Outs

ACADIA Academy - Donald Dearborn.

IX. Future Topics

A. Future Topics

August

- To Consider Community Regional Charter School's Request to Consolidate into One Building and to Incur the Debt Required to Build the Building
- Election of Officers
- Panorama Survey Results Presentation by Amy

X. Announcements

A. Important Dates

- 10/22/25 - Maine Arts Academy Ribbon Cutting Ceremony from 5 PM - 7 PM

B. Upcoming Business Meetings

- Tuesday, August 12, 2025, at 1:00 pm.

C. 2025 Graduation Dates

- Community Regional Charter School (June 13th at 6:00pm/Skowhegan Municipal Building, Opera House-Skowhegan)
- Maine Academy of Natural Sciences - Threshold Program (July 11th at 6:00pm/MeANS Campus-Hinckley)
- Maine Academy of Natural Sciences - Campus Program (July 18th at 6:00pm/MeANS Campus-Hinckley)

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 2:27 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,
Norm Higgins

Documents used during the meeting

- Dashboard for FY25 05_30_25.pdf
- Maine Arts_Amendment Guide for Amending the School's Bylaws.pdf

- Request to Incur Debt Rubric (3).pdf
- DRAFT Definitation of a School (2).pdf
- MCA Governing Board Member Information Sheet_N. Peluso_SIGNED.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.