APPROVED

Maine Charter School Commission

Minutes

Monthly Commission Meeting

Date and Time
Wednesday April 8, 2026 at 1:00 PM

Location
Room #500, 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, Leigh Albert (remote), Tom Keller

Directors Absent
None

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

I. Opening Items

A. Record Attendance

Vice Chair Tom led the meeting until Leigh joined at 1:55.

B. Call the Meeting to Order

Tom Keller called a meeting of the board of directors of Maine Charter School Commission to order on Wednesday Apr 8, 2026 at 1:04 PM.
Jim Handy read the Commission's Mission and Vision Statements.

C. To Consider the Approval of the 2/11/26 Commission Meeting Minutes

Jim Handy made a motion to approve the minutes from Monthly Commission Meeting on 02-11-26.
Brian Langley seconded the motion.
Tom asked to review James Ford attendance and voting record for the meeting. James was not in attendance for the February 11 meeting, and the voting record indicates his absence.
The board **VOTED** to approve the motion.

Roll Call

Jim Handy	Aye
James Ford	Aye
Brian Langley	Aye
Tom Keller	Aye
Leigh Albert	Absent

II. Committee Reports

A. School Performance Committee

Tom reported that the School Performance Committee discussed the following:

Commission member status - A confirmation hearing for Jeremy Ray will be held on April 2nd. It is expected that Jeremy will take Norm Higgins' seat. Leigh will not seek renomination of her post. Two State Board of Education members remain to be appointed.

Mid-Year School Reports prepared by Staff.

School renewal evaluation support proposal to provide assistance with quantitative academic analysis and qualitative reviews for schools up for Charter renewals.

Board to board meeting with ACADIA Academy.

Possible postponement of the Hall of Flags in May as legislature will not be in session.

B. Finance Committee

Leigh reported on the *joint* meeting with the Executive Committee.

Finance - The Committee reviewed the monthly financials and a draft of FY27 budget. They discussed the impact of the Commission's structural change to being a Public Instrumentality of the State bringing a new external audit requirement, purchases of computer hardware and software, new e-mail addresses, etc.

Executive - The Committee discussed the membership transitions on the Commission and reviewed the enrollment and financial reporting of the school portfolio.

C. Executive Committee

See Joint meeting reports in the Finance Committee Section.

III. Public Comment*

A. Public Comment

As Norm Higgins steps down from the Commission, he thanked the Commission for supporting him during his term as Chair and celebrated their accomplishments. He recognized the quality of work from the schools, school leaders, boards and teachers and spoke of the challenges and opportunities ahead including the development of AI, career and technological education, and rural community needs. Finally, he thanked the staff for their efforts.

Heather King reported that Meagan Rivard a senior at Maine Arts Academy won the state Poetry Out Loud competition and will compete at Nationals. Steve Legawiec, Theater Director coached.

Mallory Cook of the Maine Education Association discussed the portfolio pathway developed by a group of local superintendents to address Chapter 115 teacher

certification changes from the last legislative session. She asked that the Commission review examples created for the State Board and develop something similar for charter schools to ease the certification process.

Ryan Anthony reported on the third annual MEANS Maple Sunday event. MEANS is registered as a syrup producer and is on the Maine Maple Producer Association map. Students do all of the work to get ready for the event including setting up the equipment, tapping the trees, boiling the sap, designing jug labels, building a kiosk and restoring of the woods when done. The event provides many learning opportunities from math and science to writing and history.

Anna Klein Christie reported that Baxter students won a robotics award for software development at the regional robotics competition in Vermont. Also, Junior Lydia Ellingwood placed 7th at the State Math Meet and the chess team was third at a statewide chess competition. Anna also discussed the joyful learning environment at Baxter with its Flex Friday projects and many opportunities to explore and research topics in depth.

Elizabeth Firnkes shared that CRCS recently held a well attended overnight social event at the Overman Academy known as the John Shea Ravencon to honor and raise scholarship funds for a former student. Elizabeth also noted that Career Week at all of the CRCS will be beginning in Mid-May. The schools invite community members to come and talk about careers.

Leza reported that the ELC Honors Biology Group is working with a local forester who partners with Bowsprit Foundation and the University of Maine to perform fieldwork identifying stands of green and brown ash. Other ELC partnerships include one with the Waldo County Soil and Water Conservation District where students participated in live stake harvesting and planting to stabilize soil around Lake Winnecook. Leza will provide her slide presentation for the Commission members to review.

IV. Executive Director/Commission Staff Report

A. School Updates

All school updates were provided in the public comments.

B. Organizational Updates

Lana shared the following:

- Commission member transitions - To make up the volunteer Commission, there are four gubernatorial appointments and three State Board (SBOE) members. There is currently one open SBOE seat and with James Ford moving of the Board, another seat will be open. Superintendent Jeremy Ray will be coming on to replace Norm Higgins. Lana expressed deep gratitude for Norm's time on the Commission.

- Lana presented to the SBOE on February 12th and provided updates on 5 categories:

1. The charter public school landscape is small but important with 10 schools serving 2,834 students or 1.6% of the total school population. They provide different options alongside the district public schools.
2. The schools operate using an open enrollment policy with no admission requirements. They use a blind lottery if demand exceeds capacity. Of note, enrollment trends indicate previously home-schooled and private school students are enrolling bringing them back to a public education.
3. Accountability & Performance - The Commission holds schools to a high accountability standard that is measured by the Performance Framework. The Commission balances this accountability with support including nearly monthly professional development sessions.
4. Funding structure - The schools are funded by the MDOE using the same per pupil mechanism as the district schools. Because the public charter schools enroll students from multiple districts, the state pays 100% of the minimally acceptable per pupil amount. Unlike district public schools, the charter schools are not able to raise additional revenue through local taxes. mechanism to raise additional $ through local taxes.
5. The Commission's recent change in operating structure to one of a Public Instrumentality of the State allows cost savings and more efficient funds management.

- Mid-Year Meetings Summary - Lana described these non-statutorily required meetings as a helpful mid-year checkpoint with discussion centered on any areas of the performance framework where schools were not meeting expectations last year. Overall strengths noted are:
    - Improved school board governance and compliance.
    - High program quality and a positive culture was noted by the schools. Student engagement is strong with more clubs and activity offerings.
    - Graduation outcomes continue to be good.
- Areas of growth reported are:
    - Math proficiency remains an area of concern with new curriculum is being tried at some schools.

    - Chronic absenteeism remains challenging. Several of the schools reported improvement but it is a large effort.
- Brief highlights by school are:
    - ACADIA - On time submissions has improved this year.
    - Baxter School of Science and Technology - Positive school atmosphere is noted.
    - Community Regional Charter School - Making strong progress on intervention plan with encouraging early academic data.
    - Ecology Learning Center - Demonstrates strong academic outcomes with high program quality.
    - Fiddlehead School of Arts and Sciences - Making strong progress on intervention plan. Panorama participation has increased.
    - Maine Academy of Natural Sciences - Progress in board governance. Academic programming continues to be deeply integrated with school culture.
    - Maine Arts Academy - Successfully launched their middle school with a positive culture.
    - Maine Connections Academy - Maintains a clear system of data use to inform instruction & planning.
    - Maine Virtual Academy - Maintains strong internal alignment on a collaborative staff culture.
- The planned May Hall of Flags event is postponed until the legislators return for the next legislative session. A new date is forthcoming. Jim noted that having an event in the first year of the legislative session is consistent with the process for many other organizations.
- Panorama - Amy reported that the Panorama survey window is open. The schools administer the survey to students, family, teachers and staff. Amy thanked the schools for their pre-work efforts in opening the surveys and reported that participation looks strong. Two windows were open this year with CRCS opening from January to April 9th and all others closing on June 9th. CRCS window from January to April. Others will close on June 9.

C. Media Updates

Twin City Publications - Jenna "Crow" Veinote has been named the January Student of the Month at Maine Connections Academy

V. Monthly School Portfolio/Data Report

A. SY26-27 Enrollment Lottery Update

Amy informed that any student residing in the State of Maine is eligible to apply to a charter public school. The school must enroll all students who wish to attend unless the

number of students exceeds the enrollment capacity of a program, class, grade level or building. If capacity is exceeded, the school must hold an enrollment lottery with preference given to those already enrolled or to siblings of those enrolled. The schools also may give preference to children of charter public school founders, governing board members, and full-time employees.

The schools choose when to open their enrollment window, often in January or February. Reasonable notice of at least 30 days must be given and publicized on appropriate websites and newspapers. Current students must submit an intent to reenroll form and new students must complete a declaration of intent form that includes grade level, school the student wishes to enter and the student's resident district.

The need for an enrollment lottery is determined at end of the open enrollment period, and the lottery must be conducted no later than April 1st per statute. The lottery randomly selects students to eliminate any discrimination and must be conducted in public with reasonable notice given. Any students not selected are placed on a waitlist.

This year, five of the ten charter public schools held a lottery. 2,798 students have been confirmed for enrollment in SY26-27. 421 are on wait list.

If students want to apply after the open enrollment period, the enrollment is on a rolling basis. If space is available, the student will get a slot or go on wait list if no space is available.

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

A. New Governing Board Members

- *ACADIA Academy (Ryan Gagnon)*
- *Maine Arts Academy (Kelly Clark)*
- *Maine Arts Academy (Michael Fortin)*

B. Board Member Resignations/Left the Board

- *ACADIA Academy (Mary Morrissey Torsch)*

C. Board Member Term Outs

None

VII. Future Topics

A. Future Topics

May

- CRCS Proposed Changes to its Food Service Program
- Renewal Timeline
- Maine Charter School Commission FY27 Budget

VIII. Announcements

A. Important Dates

Graduation

- *Sunday, May 31st at 12:00pm - Maine Arts Academy (Augusta Civic Center)*
- *Friday, June 5th at 2:00pm - Maine Connections Academy (Merrill Auditorium, Portland)*
- *Friday, June 5th at 2:00pm - Maine Virtual Academy (Zoom)*

Professional Development

- *Tuesday, May 19 (9:30-11:30am) - Planning for the Summer/Making the Most of the Summer Months - Zoom Only*

Other

Saturday, May 2, 2026 (11:00am-1:00pm)- Maine Arts Academy's 10-Year Anniversary Gala

B. Upcoming Business Meeting(s)

- *May 13, 2026 - Zoom Only*
- *June 10, 2026 - Maine Academy of Natural Sciences, 13 Easler Road, Hinckley or Zoom*

IX. Closing Items

A. Adjourn Meeting

Jim Handy made a motion to Adjourn.
Tom Keller seconded the motion.
The board **VOTED** unanimously to approve the motion.

Roll Call

Brian Langley	Aye
James Ford	Aye
Jim Handy	Aye
Leigh Albert	Aye
Tom Keller	Aye

There being no further business to be transacted, and upon motion duly made, seconded and approved, the meeting was adjourned at 2:20 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,
Leigh Albert

Documents used during the meeting

- SY25-26 Midyear Meeting Summary.pdf
- MCA January Student of Month in twincitypub.pdf
- ACADIA New Governing Board Member (Ryan Gagnon).pdf
- MeAA New Governing Board Member (Kelly Clark).pdf
- MeAA New Governing Board Member (Michael Fortin).pdf

---

* 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.