

Report of the Review Team for the Maine Virtual Academy  
October 10, 2014

Maine Virtual Academy Review Team Report and Recommendation by Chair Michael Wilhelm, Ande Smith and John Bird. The team was assisted by Peg Armstrong, Abby Monahan, and Kristi Littlefield from the Department of Education, Will Diehl from UNE, and Bob Kautz MCSC Executive Director.

**A. Education Plan – Mission, Vision, Targeted Student Population; Academic Program; Special Student Population; Assessment; School Climate; and Discipline**

**Strengths:**

- The school offers a clearly stated mission and vision and provides for a research-driven program that aligns with state and federal laws and policies.
- The Educational Service Provider will provide a broad array of course offerings as well as other programs and resources. The curriculum will be aligned to the Maine Learning Results and Common Core by the education service provider.
- The choice of education service provider (K12) is supported by documentation of successful programs, most notably a recently established school in New Mexico with similar demographics.
- Requirements for graduation are proposed to exceed the State minimum.
- Student performance will be monitored with a data driven system of assessments.
- Individual student learning plans will be created to address the various needs of students.
- The application presents a special education service model that is comprehensive.
- School climate,, in a non-traditional sense, will be monitored by Learning Coaches, teachers and a counselor.
- School meets need for rural and some student segments( i.e.; bullying victim).

**Questions/Concerns:**

- The student teacher ratio appears high.
- It is not evident that there is sufficient quality control based on hiring, orientation and professional development practices?
- Graduation requirements are based on credit accumulation will little reference to future proficiency based graduation requirements.
- The application does not clearly demonstrate how the needs of all identified populations, including those needing alternative assessments, will be addressed.
- Culture and social interaction are a challenge in this model and will require strong execution.
- ELL will be challenging, but is adequately addressed.

## **Education Plan Summary**

**Is the Education Plan compelling? Does the applicant make a strong case for the quality of the program? Does the Education Plan support the vision and mission of the school?**

The Education Plan for MEVA is well articulated and dependent upon an experienced Education Service Provider. All components of the plan appear to support the mission and vision of the school.

### **B. Organizational and Operational Plan – School Calendar and Daily Schedule; Student Recruitment and Enrollment; Staffing and Human Resources; Pre-Opening Plan; Management Operations; Parent and Community Involvement**

#### **Strengths:**

- The school provides for a nationally recognized professional development program.
- The educational service provider will provide a plan and expertise for recruiting staff and students.
- There is a comprehensive evaluation plan in which the CEO will play a significant role.
- There is a data -driven bonus system to incentivize teachers.
- The core staff will be living and working in Maine.
- A specific “building” location for the school will provide for greater accessibility to staff for students and parents and for greater professional collaboration and development.
- CEO, CFO, and teachers employed by Board and all staff evaluated by CEO.
- Calendar will be advantageous for some students.
- Excellent pre-opening plan.
- The governing board is knowledgeable, diverse and invested.
- Potential the moderately increased teacher budget could attract quality teachers.

#### **Questions, Concerns**

- Salaries appear to at the low –end and could impact size of teacher talent pool.
- Training of Learning Coaches could be more comprehensive, given what is expected of them.
- Greater clarity is needed with regard to the evaluative relationship of the Program Manager (an employee of K12) with the CEO.
- There is not much evidence provided of community partners.
- It may be that Special Education staffing levels are too low to meet student needs.
- There is little evidence of outreach to local school systems.
- No special education administrator is noted.

## **Organizational and Operational Plan Summary**

**Does the school have an effective plan to recruit, retain and grow an outstanding staff? Does the Management and Operation Plan support the vision and mission of the school?**

The school presents an aggressive plan to gather students from the entire state and various academic backgrounds. The school also articulates a comprehensive support plan for its students. MEVA proposes incentives for teachers as well as extensive professional development to enable recruitment but may be hampered by low salaries, high teacher student ratios, and the challenges of working virtually with learning coaches.

### **C. Governance – Governing Body, Governing Board Composition**

#### **Strengths**

- The Board is highly qualified and represents diverse and appropriate skill sets. New board members bring school and business management expertise.
- Board members articulated an understanding of and passion for the mission of the school. Board chair has virtual experience with parents and community.
- Job descriptions of the CEO and CFO (employed by the Board and responsible for overall compliance) are described as assisting the Board in the oversight and supervision of the ESP.
- The Board has been meeting regularly to prepare the application.
- The Board will access a consultant other than K12 as a resource.

#### **Questions, Concerns**

- The organizational chart does not reflect the need for the Board to invest full administrative authority in the CEO relative to evaluation and supervision of the Program Manager.
- Committees of the Board to interface with students, parents, and communities have not been fully defined or formed.
- The terms for governing committee members appear to be for one year with possible re-election annually with no other term limits in the by laws.
- Reliance on K12 to manage metrics, although reliance mitigated somewhat by teachers, CEO and staff.

### **Governance Summary**

**Are we convinced that the Board members and the Executive Leadership have the skills, background and understanding of their roles necessary to make this a viable and sustainable charter school? Does the Governance Plan support the vision and the mission of the school?**

As noted above the Board has the background and skills to be highly competent and the administrative leadership team appears on paper to lead the school and support the Board in its functions. The Board appears completely invested in the mission and vision of the school, but will require a high functioning CEO to ensure that the Board is effective in its oversight. It is however, hard to extract the ESP for general program weakness or weak results.

### **D. Business and Financial Services – Budget, Financial Management, Facilities, Transportation, Insurance, Food Service, Closure Protocol**

#### **Strengths**

- K12 can provide start up costs for first year.
- Interest from potential students/parents remains high to ensure enrollment projections, thereby providing sufficient funding.
- CFO and annual budget process will give the Board a tool to effectively manage the ESP.
- Budget appears strong.
- Mature policies and industry leading accounting package selected with K12 support.

#### **Questions, Concerns**

- No evidence of insurance for Board protection.
- The CFO position description should ensure the necessary knowledge for reporting and be familiar with state fund accounting.
- Dollars for salaries may be too few to secure the best possible teachers.
- The financial implications of the face to face expectations are not articulated.
- The application lacks much financial detail re: transportation, instructional equipment, contracts/agreements needed for special needs and related services. At times, budget detail as presented is difficult to understand.

## **Business and Financial Services Summary**

**Are we convinced that the applicant has operating capital adequate to open the school and for the first years of operation and have a viable sustainable model for the next five years? Does the Financial Plan support the vision and mission of the school?**

While funding projections suggest solid operating revenues and reserves in the first three years, there remain questions as noted above about funding for experienced teachers, face to face teacher/student interactions, special education needs, and transportation.

### **E. Education Service Provider**

#### **Strengths**

- K12 is the largest provider of online educational services kindergarten through high school in the nation. The application provides a list of the schools served in the U. S.
- The scope of services, resources; roles and responsibilities of the ESP are clearly described in the proposed contract between MEVA and K12.
- The school's independence from the ESP is well delineated and the school's role and responsibility for evaluating K12's performance is clearly stated.
- The Board understands its role. By hiring most of the staff and retaining direct control through the CEO/CFO, the Board is well positioned to manage the vendor.
- Standard assurances like the right to terminate the contract for any reason will buttress the Board's ability to manage the vendor.

#### **Questions/Concerns**

- K12 has received mixed reviews and has received some negative press. How will the school address these issues with parents and how will it insure that the issues raised by other authorizers will not occur?
- The contract must stipulate that MEVA can terminate its contract without cause.

**Does the Education Service Provider's plan support the vision and mission of the school? Describe why or why not.**

Yes. As presented in the application, the Education Service Provider's plan fully supports the mission and vision of the school. The mission of the school is to provide a robust virtual school for students in grades 7-12. The Education Service Provider will provide support in all aspects of this endeavor.

### **Maine Virtual Academy Review Team Summary Statement**

The Maine Charter School Commission review team of Michael Wilhelm, Ande Smith, and John Bird conducted a thorough review of the Maine Virtual Academy application. The Interview with the Governing Board was held on October 3, 2014. The review team reached the following conclusions:

The applicant has made a good faith effort to address the concerns of the Commission from its previous application, namely:

- The Board will employ all staff except for the program manager and office manager,
- The school will have a physical location in Maine and all teachers, administrators and staff will live and work in Maine,
- Board members have changed, displaying the necessary skills and background to govern the enterprise,
- Organizationally, the Board and CEO will have supervisory and evaluation responsibilities for all staff,
- The Board will have its own evaluation tool to evaluate the ESP,
- The Career Pathways program has been enhanced,
- CEO recruitment has already begun with a possible CEO with Superintendent experience identified, and the position salary has been increased,
- Salaries for teachers have increased to encourage more applicants,
- A more complex system of formative assessments has been developed to include the NWEA,
- It will be expected that the CEO will assume the role of “superintendent” and connect with superintendents across the state.

The committee found each section of the current application to be fully compliant.

The changes in this application in terms of governance and operations in comparison to earlier applications by this school provide greater assurance that the Board will be successfully able to manage the ESP and is sufficiently independent. In addition, the school should be made subject to the risk mitigations generally incorporated into the MeCA contract, such as unilateral right to terminate and small school populations until operational success is determined. These expectations, particularly in conjunction with Board-hired teachers will provide the opportunity to demonstrate this ESP's issues in other states are not replicated in Maine.

The Review Team's recommendation is that the Maine Virtual Academy's application move forward for further consideration by the Commission.