# Maine Charter School Commission

**DRAFT for review and acceptance at March 3, 2015, Commission Meeting**

**Minutes**

The Maine Charter School Commission held a meeting on **Tuesday, January 6, 2015**, at the Burton Cross Office Building, 111 Sewall Street, Augusta, Maine.

## I. Call to Order

Chair, Shelley Reed, called the meeting to order at 9:34 a.m.

## II. Roll Call

The following members were present: Nichi Farnham, Jana Lapoint, Laurie Pendleton, Ande Smith, Mike Wilhelm and Shelley Reed, Chair. John Bird excused.
Also in attendance were Bob Kautz, Executive Director, and Deanne Lavallee, Administrative Assistant.

## III. Adjustments to the Agenda

Add update from Fiddlehead School of Arts and Science.

## IV. Acceptance of Minutes

A. December 2, 2014, Business Meeting Minutes not available at this time.

## V. Officers' Reports

### A. Chair

**1. Update on NASCA Evaluation.**
Authorizer Evaluation Process – Katie Piehl, NASCA, 2015 is already filled.
NASCA Principals and Standards – 12 Essential Practices.
Group function amongst the Commission and the field.

**2. Executive Director and Staff Evaluation**: Sub-group to develop questions using the evaluation form: Laurie, Jana, Mike.

**3. End-of-Year Reports** – How we can expand the readership of the schools' end-of-year reports beyond the Commission and the DOE – i.e. to the Legislators to demonstrate the schools and Commission performance.

**4. Legislative Meetings** – Bob and Shelley. Bob will set up meetings with Legislative Leadership.

**B. Vice Chair**

**Maine Connections 90-day Report.**

**C. Executive Director**

**1. Proficiency-based diploma** – Meeting/Guidance/Timeline with Diana Doiron.
The Charters do not have to meet by Law the DOE Rule. But charters do have to meet for MCSC RFP and Contract criteria.
RFP says the charters will do proficiency-based, but, not how they will do it.
Develop a process similar to the DOE – i.e. application process to extend timeframe.
State deadline was October 15 for the extension application.
Diana Doiron will share information and resources with the charter schools.
Executive Director and/or Commission Group develop process for Proficiency-based diploma and any extension; and Commission agrees upon the requirement.

- Providing the schools resources.
- Use the State's criteria for extension.
- Use State criteria for diploma.

Give some latitude, learn what is the exact requirement is.
Ask Diana to speak to the Commission at the February meeting.

Diana meeting with the Baxter, Harpswell, MeANS, MCA, MVA in January has not been set up yet. Not evaluating the charter schools – Charters should come to Diana's meeting with the process they have done so far.
Notify the Commission Members of the date and time of the meeting with Diana and the charter schools to give them the opportunity to attend.

**2. MCSC Booklet** edited by John Bird; copies available.

**3. Charter School Cooperative** meeting will be January 27 at MeANS 10:00 a.m. with Bob and Shelley. Had their first meeting December 9 at Baxter to share ideas, issues – and the things they can do together.

**4. Set up meetings** with Brian Langley, Chair of Education Committee and other legislative leadership.

**5. Set some criteria** to differentiate between applications in September 2015.

**VI. Unfinished Business**

**A. Director of Program Management** Temporary Position Recruiting and Staffing Agency RFP update. Applications due 1/7/15. Ande, Shelley, Bob-Coordinator.
Consensus Meeting scheduled for Wednesday, January 14, 3:00 p.m.

**B. Update on Contract Negotiations** with **Maine Virtual Academy (MVA)** Public Virtual Charter School to open School Year Fall 2015.

Negotiations will occur around noon time today – Ande, Mike and Shelley, who has agreed to sit in for John in his absence. John is hoping to be well enough to be there for February meeting, more likely the March meeting. Would like to receive all emails to be aware of what is going on.

**Addition to Agenda - Fiddlehead update**: They have asked for a visit from Bob and I either February 4 or 5 to look at what they have done with assessment/data system in anticipation of 4th and 5th grades. The assessment is in addition to Smarter Balance.

Bruce Woodard has resigned; he has been the treasurer and done the financial piece. To fill the financial piece, they have hired a firm out of Portland, Poulin Financial Services, LLC, PA, Lori Aliberti, contracted person, will be reconciling all accounts, providing monthly reports. To manage the accounts; looking for two new board members with financial expertise to fill that void.
Two new board members – Jennifer McClure-Groover: works with the Lewiston school system, has a master's degree in Literacy Education and bachelor's in special ed.
Jody (Fein) is early childhood and social work.
At the end-of-year visit, Fiddlehead cited that these two areas finance and legal were priority areas for recruitment. The two new members are good people, but do not fill these roles. A service is not someone that is sitting on the board. Gender balance, not that there is a requirement; now 2 men and 7 women, plus Jacinda as ex-officio, this really skews their balance perspective.

Moved by Jana Lapoint; seconded by Nichi Farnham and unanimously accepted by all those present to receive the new board members and strongly encourage the Governing Board to look at securing members as soon as possible whose areas of expertise include finance and legal skills.

**C. Upcoming 127th Legislature First Session.**

**1. Review of Education-related bills**.

There is budget language dealing with charter schools' funding – state and local share to be paid by DOE.
There are several ideas (bills) on funding from both sides of the aisle.
Also, correcting some language in the charter school law i.e. public districts can limit their charter to their own students.

**D. Discussion on RFP's – Issue June 10, 2015, for School Opening Fall 2016.**

**1. Determination of scope** of next RFP- Brick & Mortar or Virtual or both.
Vote after the following discussion.

**2. Create differentiation** in the event of more applicants than openings for approved charter schools.

Bob: Creative: how to define – more subjective; Geography: objective; Grade Level: objective.
Shelley: North – Down East: no educational choices.
Jana: Tougher in evaluation of the current RFP criteria.
Respectful of the Boards who are putting together the applications.
Boards deeply involved in what they have done; have to raise the money.
Do not support any criteria.
Ande: Do not support any criteria as it comes in the door.
Strong Board, passion and capability; Strong Concept; Strength of the

application.
RFP/Rubric made to provide a reasonable and defensible mechanism to select.
If we have more than 10 out there that are ready to go, a great case to take to the Legislature.

Mike: Agree with Ande and Jana – three or four viable, co-equal applicants - use something totally arbitrary to make the decision like a lottery.

Laurie: Adhere more closely to criteria and more definitive. Meeting a local need – another Montessori School in Gray would not meet the community need. Review Groups assigned sections: Academic, Finance, Governing Board.

Nichi: Agree with all I have heard.

Bob: Need process for evaluating. How will we judge between four equal applications? I agree with Laurie – having teams for academic, finance review. Review Team for each application; Readers' rubrics will come to review team and be part of the final report that comes to the Commission.

Shelley: If I am reading the academic section, it needs to be carried through in the budget to be able to do what they say they are going to do. All the pieces have to fit.

Jana: If I am doing Finance, I have to read the academic to see if they have a budget to support i.e. do they have enough people in special ed.

Ande: Have not had four strong proposals qualified at the same time. We have a process that is reasonable; be sure we have expertise spread out among the review teams and gives us the level of scrutiny we need. Numerical scoring – use as a factor for the vote. This is #1 in the rack – A., B., C., D. Not exclusive, but it provides – a quasi-quantitative methodology to a process we have used over time.

Shelley: Wanted to have a narrative for strengths and weaknesses – not just a number. We need to know if all equal - what will be in place for the final decision. We need to know and the applicants need to know.

**We will base our decision on:**

- Really knowing the criteria.
- Reading the application well.
- Scoring the application well.
- Clear and intentional notes.

Mike: Issue is four viable applications; there is a subjective element to the final result. Lottery – no decision by the Commission.

Jana: With all the criteria, we have to look at in each section, I cannot see how they would all come out equal. If we have more than 10, the legislature could pass an emergency bill to open the cap.

Shelley: As we get the application binder, refresh the criteria contained in the RFP and Rubric. Discussing the range of numbers and what they mean. Some rank hard and some rank a little different.

Ande: Review Teams put each application forward – Commission has to deny; in that event, have a rack and stack method.

Nichi: Previously, if qualified, they got a contract.

Bob: Look at RFP and criteria to see if we can make it better, more clearly explained. I will ask Sarah what happens if it comes to the end.

Shelley: Use existing criteria and rubric.

Laurie: Based on our criteria, this school has a better chance of being successful. Fourth one could go on a waiting list.
Ande: Can't keep them on ice; board could change.

Jana: I would personally prefer that we not take any more virtual.
Ande: We have two; two of the same general purpose – all students. Other models i.e. physical facility, but curriculum is all virtual. If same as MCA and MVA, does not meet a unique community need.

Bob: Blended school would use the Brick and Mortar Application.
Laurie: Lift (enrollment) cap on MCA and MVA rather than adding another virtual school.

**Moved by Mike Wilhelm; seconded by Laurie Pendleton and approved 5 to 1 (Shelley Reed against) to issue a Virtual RFP and a Brick and Mortar RFP.**

## VII. New Business

### A. Maine Connections Academy 90-Day Visit Report by Ande Smith:

Mike, John and I Conducted on-site visit on December 8, 2014; due to the Holidays, the written report is not completed. No significant issues.
Financial statements provided only at a high-level abstraction of information; asked for more information. December 18, Ande met with CFO and Board Treasurer, Nick McGee, (only review team member invited); it was a good review of controls, oversight.
Team will ask for another meeting to discuss their budget with all members of the review team.
Line of credit with Connections, LLC, included a line with amount of money to pay back a portion of the start-up loan this year – with a three-year timeline to retire the loan.

Hiring a foreign language teacher by MCA rather than buying it from the ESP – more economic sense for them to do this way.

High rate of turnover: Around 20% churn, which was lower than the ESP expected; we had talked about it being 30%. Exit interview – predominant responses were *"This program is harder than I thought it would be."* or *"It just doesn't work for me."*

Bob: I visited with Karl and we talked about way that people going through the application process – how they can be clearly informed as to what the experience is really like. Karl is hoping to do the application process without being dependent on Connections LLC providing all the information.
Maine Connections has a parent group, Club Orange. They may have parents that would be available to talk to prospective parents of students.
Also, MCA is working on a dual enrollment with University of Maine at Fort Kent; not only for the students, but also for the parents because of MCA doing it.

We looked at where they were in the 90 days; they are tracking through the expectations we set for them. They are doing reasonably well; including when we talked with some students and faculty – it was very positive.

## VIII. Other

The Charter School Cooperative meeting will be January 27 at MeANS 10:00 a.m. with Bob and Shelley attending.

Terming Commission Members June 30, 2015: John Bird, Laurie Pendleton, Ande Smith. For the State Board of Education March 11 meeting, they each need to submit a letter asking to be reappointed and then a cover letter, resume and questionnaire for the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee.

## IX. Announcements

A. Turn in Expense Account Vouchers at the end of the meeting.

B. Next regularly scheduled meeting: **February 3, 2015,** Time: 9:30 a.m.

## X. Public Comment

Roger Brainerd: January 26, 2015, Maine Association of Charter Schools Day in the Hall of Flags 9:00-2:30.

Judith Jones: The USDOE CSP office staff may visit Maine this spring to monitor the two grants (Cornville and MeANS). Stefan Huh, the director of the program, hopes to join that visit, and MACS plans to host him and see if we can set up meetings for him with the Commission, our Ed Commissioner and staff and others.

Federal Charter School Grant Program on the state education grants – applications available in January. It would be the Maine Department of Education that would be applying for that grant. One of the criteria is for state's who have never had a grant – so Maine will rank very high on that one. Because of our cap – it will be a challenge to put together a strong application. A big part of the Maine application will be that there is no limit on the number of charters the superintendents can authorize.

The individual grant applications – like MeANS and Cornville received – they were two of the 17 nationally. That program will still exist even if Maine does not get an SEA Level Grant.

## XI. Adjourn

Motion by Jana Lapoint; seconded by Mike Wilhelm and unanimously voted by those present to adjourn at 11:50 a.m.