

Maine Charter School Commission

Senator Langley, Representative Kornfield, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs:

In response to requests from the Joint Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, Shelley Reed, Chair, on behalf of the Maine Charter School Commission, submits the following regarding our efforts to authorize and oversee the Public Charter Schools under the Charter School Law.

In order to carry out the law, the Commission has in these early stages focused on matters that accomplished our tasks. Initially, the Commission's tasks were to announce the openings to the commission, review applications and present candidates to both the State Board of Education and the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee. Following establishing an entire commission, we began the work of reviewing statutes and goals to focus on matters that accomplish the tasks such as: creation of policies and operating procedures, the Request for Proposals, Monitoring and then decision steps for renewal or nonrenewal of schools and a basic informational piece on Maine Charter Schools. We further developed job descriptions for the Executive Director and Administrative Assistant. What we have not done is create other documents that provide information beyond our immediate need and or capacity. So in this session when materials/information have been requested, we have not had a ready source to go to, but in order to comply with the requests must research , compile and format the information. The necessary time this takes does not fit with the tight time schedule that you must run on to accomplish your work. So it was with budget information and the latest request to provide a side-by-side analysis of the virtual schools.

When an applicant submits a proposal, it is first judged for completeness of materials; then it is sent to a Review Team to look at several aspects of the charter school. Does the proposal address student populations whose needs are not currently being served, does it include innovative design, does it have a compelling mission and vision that is articulated throughout the document? Then the proposal is scrutinized in the four categories of academics, governance, financials and organization that contain over 110 evaluation criteria. Findings of fact are focused on these evaluation criteria . The ultimate question is: does the Review Team find in this proposal the capacity to be a successful public charter school? Schools are rated on their own merit not in comparison with another applicant. Therefore, a side-by-side analysis is not a procedural step in the process of authorization.

In order to meet the request, a material review of the Findings of Fact and the 600 page Applications submitted by both the Maine Connections Academy and the Maine Virtual Academy was conducted.

General comparison similarities for Maine Connections Academy and Maine Virtual Academy

Approved by Maine Department of Education as an online provider (K12 and Connections)

Student range of grades 7-12

Provide virtual online uniquely individualized learning program. Innovation is both in design and implementation

Meet an unmet need where students have not had access to a virtual school and its innovative curriculum approach by demonstration of interest in this approach by Maine families and students up to 3,000 interested requests for information. Keeping Pace publication reports Maine online learning is limited at present. (iNACOL International Association for K-12 online learning)

Students attracted to Virtual Learning Environments include those bullied, socially ostracized, homebound, those needing flexible schedules for advanced participation in arts or sports (for example)

Parents as Learning Coaches are afforded intense involvement in the student's education

Employ Maine Certified Teachers and co-locate teachers to form learning centers

Teachers are provided training in how to be an effective and engaging in the online learning environment

Computers, printers provided to students/families of free/reduced lunch and internet reimbursement

Hands-on kits are shipped directly to the student's house

Data driven decision making for proficiency-based academic program grounded in Individualized Learning Plan

Fit in with Core Priority Area 3 of Education Evolving Maine's Plan for Putting Learners First embracing multiple pathways for learner achievement

Per the Application both proposed charter schools demonstrated:

A viable model that will meet the needs of students it wishes to serve

A strong case for the quality of the program

Effective plan to recruit, train and grow an outstanding staff

Board members and executive leadership with skills and the understanding to make this a viable and sustainable public charter school

Operating capital to open the school for year one and have a viable sustainable model for the next five years

Educational Services Providers that support the mission and vision of the charter school and address all additional criteria.

Points of differentiation have been brought to the Education Committee such as:

Catchment area -even though they are virtual schools, by RFP requirements they must have a teaching center which creates access for students and families for face-to-face meetings

Maine Connections Academy is headquartered in South Portland,

Maine Virtual Academy will be headquartered in the Central region of the state.

Software platform -which means how they deliver curriculum content in an innovative way. It is helpful to think of MAC vs PC or X-Box vs Play Station. While both may accomplish the same end, how you engage with the mechanics of the format is individual preference.

The two Education Service Providers arrive at their content and assessment delivery in different ways

Offerings- which might be described as a theme or opportunity to focus on an area such as MCA with the arts and a collaboration with Julliard or MEVA with career pathways

Maine Connections Academy has programs associated with the world famous conservatory Julliard School of Music. Julliard eLearning is the first ever group of online courses which include music theory, music history, drama history, and dance history. Synchronous virtual music instrumental and master classes will be offered.

Maine Virtual Academy will offer a Career Pathways Program that allows students to pursue a pathway based on the National Career Cluster model. Each pathway accommodates a student's specific career interest and capabilities. Exploratory courses will offer a broad overview of careers, including interest surveys, seminars and assemblies with guest speakers. Pathway Courses are foundational and lead to a diploma endorsement as well as industry certification. Concurrent enrollment courses for college credit will also be arranged based on student grade level and academic performance. Internships may be pursued in the high school senior year. Career Pathways offered will be Business Management and Marketing Management, Health Services, Restaurants and Food/Beverage Services, Web Communication Programming and Software Development, A/V Technology and Film, Advanced Manufacturing, and Law Enforcement Services.

Comparisons must go deeper-even if we take a look at Baxter Academy and Maine Academy for Natural Sciences we could say they are both high schools, both brick and mortar schools, both project based, both science based, they have many differences in terms of students they are creating opportunities for, catchment areas urban and rural, natural science vs STEM and to read their applications would make clear specific differences in the approach to academics and the school organization.

Comparison of Maine Connections Academy and Maine Virtual Academy

Match up of criteria	Maine Connections Academy In year one of operation 2014-2015	Maine Virtual Academy 2015-2016 first school year
Graduation	22 credits,(for students whose high school career operated in that system) transition to proficiency based reporting	24 credits 30 hours community service (for students whose high school career operated in that system) transition to proficiency based reporting
Training- Parents	Parent initial training and provided additional support throughout the year by webmail, face to face and newsletters Parents make up 20% of the Board Family projects-Design Board Games, What it means to be green, Model bridge building, Orienteering	Parents participate in Strong Start making the transition to a virtual learning environment, monthly sessions throughout the year including face to face if desired Synchronous sessions, Parent Advisory Group, Governing Board, Workshops, Hotline, Roundtable discussions, Clubs(including Military)

Training-Staff	7 day preservice training and supplemental teacher training course segments throughout the year Online professional development Graduate level courses by arrangement with Boise State University Teachers trained in students in distress: Recognizing bullying, cyberbullying, neglect/abuse and depression	50-60 hour, 4 week series for new teachers, ongoing support including 1 on 1 instructional coaching Online professional development and extended opportunities
Special Education	Adhere to state and federal regulations, IDEA,ADAA, prereferral, Child Find, identification, evaluation, determination of eligibility, develop IEP, assistive technology, provide related services such as speech, occupational therapy, physical therapy, transition needs, counselors, psychological services in geographic vicinity of student	Adhere to state and federal regulations, IDEA,ADAA, prereferral, Child Find, identification, evaluation, determination of eligibility, develop IEP,assistive technology, provide related services such as speech, occupational therapy, physical therapy, transition needs, counselors, psychological services in geographic vicinity of student
ELL	Assessment, Screening and Programming	Assessment, Screening and Programming
Spectrums of Student Populations	Gifted and Talented-challenging assignments ,opportunities for group interaction, extensions, investigations, high level thinking, Honors, 18 AP offerings, Independent Study	Gifted and Talented-individualized levels, pace, style, subject level, topical enrichment, subject acceleration, curriculum compacting
Students-At-Risk	Individualized learning pace, content, sequence, 24/7 tutorials and teachlets, online and offline interaction for diverse learning styles	Online tutoring Blackboard Collaborative, Study Island, NWEA given 2 times a year, assessment for remediation, instruction in study skills, interventions, face to face at Learning Center
Alignment of Curriculum	Maine Learning Results, Common Core	Maine Learning Results, Common Core, Next Gen Science Standards

Courses offered	Course levels for foundations, standard, honors or AP, selection based on college and career goals. Online time grades 7-12 equals 50-75+% of learning, with projects, offline assignments, practice work, novels. Ala carte offerings,CTE offerings Foreign language classes in Spanish, Sign Language, French, German, Japanese, Latin, Mandarin Chinese.	150 high school courses levels of core, comprehensive, honors, AP, remediation, credit recovery Electives like Anthropology, Web design, entrepreneurship,interactive science labs Languages-5 years of Spanish, French;4 years of German;2 years of Latin, Chinese, Japanese
Clubs/Extracurricular	22 Clubs-Art, Book, Chess, Digital Storytelling, Math Club, Pen Pals, Poetry Corner, Science Fair, Book Chats, Teacher led small group discussions, virtual based bulletin boards and forums, online yearbook	Connect with 33 state network and internationally with clubs-Brain Teasers, Culinary, Creative Writing, Debate, Living Green, International Travel, Sports, Yoga, Mathematical Mysteries, Photography, Music, Health and Fitness
Diverse Learning	Online and offline interaction, 1600 Teachlet proprietary instructional movies, 1,000 primary source and instruction videos, i-text electronic textbooks	Learning Management System creates access to more than 22,000 online lessons, assessment, hands-on activities, alternative learning, classroom collaboration tools, optional and supplemental lessons and activities, lesson planning and school tools to track progress
Instructional Design	ADDIE-Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation, Evaluation. Course creation year 1, Major Revisions year 3, Complete rewrite and new text year 6 Synchronous and asynchronous learning	Based on 50 years of cognitive science research on how students learn, instructional design principles, methods for teaching specific topics. The K12 Evaluation and Research Team align research, measurement and instructional strategies. Online and traditional instruction and materials are used. Middle school is self-paced while high school will make use of a weekly schedule of assignments and activities.

Software /Programs	Connexus, Live lesson sessions, multi-tiered intervention, STTAIR=systematic approach to instruction, PACE=program for all children to excel interventions for proficiency in reading and math, LEAP=Longitudinal evaluation of academic program, curriculum instruction and instruction appropriate to their achievement level Internet Safety Course-all computers heightened internet security settings and internet filtering software.	Blackboard Collaborate a web-based conference platform, interactive whiteboard, voice over IP Learning Management System scores assessments and assignments MyInfo is the student grade book section of the LMS giving a current report of a student's progress TotalView School provides staff a secure, internal communications tool, student information functions specific student data, generates student transcripts, and shipment status of curriculum materials. Turn-it-in a plagiarism checking service
Assessment	Instruction based on virtual learning /different from traditional educational model with diagnostic tools, formative assessment, daily work, portfolio, state assessment,PAAP,SAT, WIDA Access, Connexus School Accountability Report Card (SARC) developed annually by staff and made publically available State assessment not taken in home but at a proctored setting	NWEA 2 times a year, MeCA's,MEA, Smarter Balance, National Center Student Collaborative, PAAP,PSAT,SAT, WIDA Access, USA Test Prep, Student Achievement Improvement Process (SAIP) formative curriculum assessment, summative assessment, Study Island benchmark assessment, work samples, embedded in curriculum by lesson, unit, semester
School Climate and Culture	Student Code of Conduct Climate survey with students, staff and parents Support services	Student Code of Conduct Climate survey with students, staff and parents Support services Climate survey with students, staff and parents Support services

In conclusion, the Maine Charter School Commission hopes that you will find that this information gives you an insight into the Virtual School learning experience and insight into our work as well.