Maine Connections Academy: 2017-2018 Enrollment Increase Request

Proposal and Supporting Data:

To take effect in 2017-2018, we propose an increase of 100 students from the granted 429. We had requested an increase of 150 last year but were denied; the request was made after funding was already allocated and the Commission wanted to examine two years of evidence. In our two years we have had a lower than expected withdrawal rate of 19% during 2015-2016, as well as SAT scores with an average of 997, which is above the state average of 992 and above the national average of 981.

In terms of our internal assessment, LEAP, we did show slight improvement. As noted in the End of Year report, the percent of students showing growth in Math increased from 57.7% to 63.6%; meeting the target. The percent of students showing growth in Reading declined from 67.1% to 58.8%. Although MCA did not meet the target in this area, the average posttest score did improve slightly from 69 to 71.1.

This year we have increased leadership capacity through a new structure in which we have a high school lead teacher and a middle school lead teacher. These teachers have been assisting in pulling data and reviewing with teams. We also have a virtual intervention lead who is working closely with students through Reading Plus and Think Through Math – our online reading and math intervention tools – to help students close skill gaps.

With two years behind us and a solid plan in place, we feel confident that additional enrollment allows us to better serve family needs while further decreasing our student-teacher ratio and increasing internal leadership opportunities.

This request is also based on the following pieces of information:

1. **Family Choice and Documented Interest**
   We have many families interested in joining that are currently on the waitlist. We currently have approximately 370 students in the enrollment pipeline.

2. **Staffing Plans**
   With an increase of 100 students, we would be able to hire approximately three teachers. We do not project needing an additional special education teacher since special education is approximately 12.5% of our population, but knowing that this percentage can change, we will closely monitor this need and are prepared to adjust as needed.

3. **Facility Plans**
   With an increase in students, there are two options we are investigating, each of which have merit. As written in our charter application on page 175, we are interested in securing a satellite office near Bangor to serve as a resource center for students. We feel

this could be a good option because it has always been part of the school vision, but more important, it improves our ability to help students throughout the state of Maine.

A satellite office would have the following benefits:

- Assurance that we are maintaining and increasing engagement with students from different areas
- Reduced travel time and cost for administering state tests throughout the state
- Increased ability to conduct home visits during non-engagement or instances of truancy
- Opportunity to grow in central and northern Maine in order to effectively reach all students
- More efficient for face-to-face socialization opportunities such as field trips

In order to ensure proper oversight of a satellite office, the site would need a staff member serving in an administrative capacity in order to ensure high-quality operations. Maine Connections Academy administration would also remotely oversee the operation, but physically check-in at least once per month.

The second option we are investigating is expanding the current office in South Portland. There are at least two suites available in our current South Portland office complex that could suit our needs for additional space. We are currently talking with the landlord about gaining the Right of First Refusal on this space.

Expanding the facility in South Portland would have the following benefits:

- Less initial cost
- Easier move and logistics
- Closer oversight by administration
- Flexible spaces and grouping available
- Students and families know and are comfortable with the space
- Our current site could have more student work stations and face-to-face opportunities
- Our current site could have more collaborative spaces and meeting areas for staff
- Less need to hire administrative support would allow us to reduce student-teacher ratio
- A lease term that matches our current space; allowing for more options once the lease expires

Maine Connections Academy – Enrollment Request for 2017-2018 School Year

For the 2017-2018 school years we would like to increase our enrollment by 100 students and include a sixth grade of 30 students as part of the total 529. This would require additional teacher space and staff, yet this is afforded by the increased budget, as illustrated in the following sample table:

	+50 Students from FY17	**+100 Students from FY17**
Teacher Salary	$80,000 (2-2.5 teachers)	$139,000 (3-3.5 teachers)
Administrative assistant salary	$7,500 Stipend	$30,000
Facilities and renovation	$53,658.85	$53,658.85
(Total Teacher Budget)	$109,085.00	$183,586.60
Surplus		$44,757.84

All additional items have been budgeted with increase, including:

- Increased staff support for state testing
- Staff recruiting
- Graduation and special events
- General operating expenses

We have projected the budget in a number of scenarios based on need.

How this plan benefits students and the school:

1. **The longer students are enrolled in Connections-supported schools, the better they fare academically.** The following table shows the percentage of students scoring proficient or better for the 2012-13 school year based on length of enrollment. The data is for all students tested in grades 3-8 and grades 10-11.

Subject	**3 Consecutive Years**	**2 Consecutive Years**	**First Year Students**
Math	59% n = 3,006	57% n = 2,491	50% n = 11,930
Reading	75% n = 3,021	73% n = 2,554	67% n = 12,457
Science	72% n = 1,294	65% n = 1,050	57% n = 5,000
Writing	58% n = 728	56% n = 601	56% n = 2,717

2. **Ability to increase student engagement**
   More than simply being able to afford more teachers, a student increase can allow us greater space to collaborate. Due to the size of the new space, we will also be able to offer the chance for students and teachers to engage in select blended options, thus opening the door to offer face-to-face support, learning, and engagement through special events.

3. **Increased administrative support**
   In order to ensure that we are able to update student placement and records, the plan affords additional administrative support. With the surplus in staff, this can be used in order to assist students, counseling, enrollment, and administrative needs.

4. **Increased teacher satisfaction**
   Beyond being able to hire additional staff to support students, these additional teachers will assist with curriculum development, proficiency work, and for collaboration purposes. Current departments that have grown have benefitted from teams of at least three teachers. If needed, we also have a reserve that we can use to offer raises. This budget allows for a surplus so that we can be flexible based on need.

5. **Stable increase in grade 6**
   We would like to offer an increase of 30 students in grade 6. We currently have homeroom teacher loads of 30 students, allowing for one-on-one contact at least every two weeks. Using this model, we feel comfortable piloting a sixth grade class. This model will allow middle school teachers to have a wider collaborative base as well, thus distributing teaching responsibilities more equitably.

Projected Enrollment Plan:

2016-2017 (Year 3): Allocated 429 students

2017-2018 (Year 4): Additional 100 students with sixth grade pilot for total of 529 students

2018-2019 (Year 5): Enrollment to remain at 529 – review results and complete charter application work

Maine Connections Academy: 2017-2018 Grade 6 Proposal

If our enrollment increase is granted, we would like to discuss the possibility of adding 6th grade. As we will be hiring new teachers, we will also have the opportunity to hire teachers with K-8 certification. These teachers can work with the grade six students and can also work in a middle-school teaching capacity if needed; alleviating some of the work our grade 7 & 8 teachers. The 6th grade increase would be included in the student number increase.

All oversight will still be provided by our current administrative structure.

The decision to propose this has been carefully considered and takes into account the following points:

1. **Connections Education – Assessment Data Favors Grade 6**

Many parents have asked for lower-grade enrollment; beyond that, grade six students are highly successful in Connections Academy schools. Internal LEAP scores from 2015-2016 show the following:

	PRETEST		MIDTEST		POSTTEST	
Grade	Students Tested *Reading* Pretest	Average *Reading* Pretest Score	Students Tested *Reading* Midtest	Average *Reading* Midtest Score	Students Tested *Reading* Posttest	Average *Reading* Posttest Score
6	3903	65.3	2999	72.2	2907	69.8
7	4806	63.1	3282	61.7	3458	68.4
8	5396	63.1	4077	64.8	3965	63.7
Total	**24870**	**64.7**	**18746**	**71.0**	**18740**	**70.0**

	PRETEST		MIDTEST		POSTTEST	
Grade	Students Tested *Math* Pretest	Average *Math* Pretest Score	Students Tested *Math* Midtest	Average *Math* Midtest Score	Students Tested *Math* Posttest	Average *Math* Posttest Score
6	4080	45.1	3045	53.1	2917	60.0
7	4929	46.2	3322	53.8	3468	57.6
8	5447	41.3	4092	47.2	3937	56.4
Total	**29633**	**52.6**	**22563**	**63.6**	22320	69.6

On LEAP, students have displayed growth in performance if they score a minimum of 75% on the posttest assessment and/or if they increase their score from the pretest to the posttest by 10 percentage points.

LEAP Reading Growth:

Grade	Number of Students with Pretest and Posttest Scores	% of Students with Growth in *Reading*
6	2270	59.6%
7	2651	51.2%
8	3148	60.5%
Overall	14742	62.2%

LEAP Math Growth:

Grade	Number of Students with Pretest and Posttest Scores	% of Students with Growth in *Math*
6	2376	65.0%
7	2764	58.5%
8	3214	65.5%
Overall	18372	76.2%

2. **Maine Connections Academy – Truancy Primarily Affects High School**

Our truancy rate is well documented and controlled. As noted in our End of Year report, 6 students were habitually truant and 20 students had one or more instances of documented truancy. Maine Connections Academy's internal data also shows that 17 of our 26 truant students (65%) were high school students.

3. **Maine Connections Academy – High Student Re-Enrollment**

As noted in the end-of-year report, the during school year retention rate as of 5/31/16 was 82%; a 5-percentage point improvement over the 2014-2015 retention rate of 77%. Returning students are more successful; by expanding our grade offering we are promoting returning students.

4. **Desire for Balanced Staffing Model**

We have a distributed leadership structure in which we are trying to build a solid middle school and high school population. Currently, we have two grades in the middle school level and four in the high-school level. In order to maintain focus on high achievement in the younger grades, we feel it makes sense to consciously increase our pre-high school grade offerings by opening grade six.