

Summary Report of Review Team for MeCA

Team: Ande Smith, John Bird, Michael Wilhelm, Dick Barnes

Executive Summary

The Team reviewed the MeCA application and conducted an interview with MeCA on January 15, 2014. Based upon these and other materials submitted to the team, MeCA is unanimously recommended to proceed to public hearing and further consideration by the Commission.

Summary of Rating Scores

MECA Score	Ed Plan	Man/Ops	Gov	Biz/Fin	ESP	Total
Ande	8	8	6	4	6	32
John	7	5	5	5	6	28
Mike	6	6	5	6	6	29
Dick	5	7	6	6	6	<u>30</u>
					AVG	29.75

Observations

1. Education Plan

Generally, the group found that the education plan comprehensively described the model and approach of MeCA's program. Its strengths included:

- Availability of metrics and assessments to provide data-driven decisions
- Flexibility of individual learning plans
- Offers an alternative to traditional schools with the potential benefits to some student (e.g., rural populations, victims of bullying)
- Strong ala-carte course offerings
- Maine-based delivery from local teachers, so long as teachers are from Maine.

Noted weaknesses and concerns include:

- No special ed teacher in year 1 suggesting inadequate capacity and there is no budget contingency to mitigate
- Unclear what level of support can be provided for 504 and ELL students
- Effectiveness of program for ELL students
- Graduation target of 70% seems inappropriately low
- Lack of detail on transition plan to proficiency based diploma
- Vetting, training, and oversight of learning coaches.
- Teacher/student ratio seems low
- Culture and social interaction of students left vaguely stated in proposal and will require strong execution

Additional comments of note from peer reviewers:

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2. Management and Operations

Generally, the team found that the management and operations of the proposed school were strong. Its strengths included:

- Flexible calendar will be advantageous to some students
- Solid pre-opening and recruiting plan
- Professional development for teachers strongly articulated, supported by local operating centers to facilitate teacher interaction and mutual support
- Model of delivery may attract strong teachers
- Teachers and school leaders are employees of the school, not ESP

Noted weaknesses and concerns include:

- Program will require high-quality teachers with multiple certifications to achieve best results, but budgeted salaries seem ominously low and student/teacher ratio high
- Pre-packed curriculum will limit teacher initiative and professional judgement
- In-person contact with students will be dependent on learning coaches and success will hinge on them. Unclear whether training is adequate.
- While strongly articulated, it is unclear if plan will effectively recruit from state's rural and other target populations
- Board oversight of HR function potentially problematic
- Only one community partner commitment
- Job of the CEO as business manager and principal will be challenging to execute effectively

Additional comments of note from peer reviewers:

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3. Governance

Generally, the team found that the governance plan of the proposed school is reasonably strong and provides requisite indicia of independence. The review team found that the formation of the Board was catalyzed by the ESP, but based on the current structure, board composition, independent actions (e.g., replacing board members), and its representations and demeanor during interviews, the team was of the common view that the MeCA board is independent and has the capacity to effectively manage the ESP and chart the direction of the school. The RFP's strengths included:

- The board's members deliver business experience, educator/school management, political and state sophistication, and virtual/public school board advocacy experience.
- The board's representation evidences a strong geographic diversity
- The board evidenced strong knowledge of the school's facets during interviews. Of note, the ESP representatives provided virtually no responses to the team's questions regarding the school and its operations.

Noted weaknesses and concerns include:

- A significant portion of day-to-day operations and special ed services are outsourced to the ESP
- Only one member of the board has ever served on a school board, which raises concerns about its acumen in managing a school as a board
- Unclear if it can effectively manage all the contract provisions and will require a strong CEO in support of the board, especially if that person is charged with day-to-day operations as well
- Board will rely on ESP-provided metrics, so raises some concern whether it can independently "pierce the veil" to identify delivery/performance issues before they are reflected in student performance

Additional comments of note from peer reviewers:

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4. Business and Financial

Generally, the team found that the management and operations of the proposed school were strong. Its strengths included:

- Good budget detail and in general budget appears sound

Noted weaknesses include:

- Accounting and financial control practices are not strongly documented
- Closure plan seemed cursory
- Teacher budget (both FTE and salaries) seems low with inadequate budget for special education
- Management oversight will be key to ensure that ESP value matches expenditures
- Needs criteria for selecting future contracts
- Light detail for learning centers and without leases cannot be closely evaluated
- Unclear if special education budget will cover population
- Unclear if transportation budget will be adequate
- Budget has little contingency for hiring staff or contractors other than ESP

Additional comments of note from peer reviewers:

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5. ESP

Generally, the team found that the management and operations of the proposed school were strong. Its strengths included:

- ESP appears to have strong track record for operational execution compared to its peers in other states.
- Solid detail in RFP, including disclosure of where it was outperformed by other ESPs.
- Self-generated survey reflects high level of parent satisfaction
- ESP has had no school relationship revoked or not denied renewal
- Governing board has independence and tools to manage and evaluate ESP performance

Noted weaknesses include:

- Despite staffing model, ESP has strong leverage in the contract.
- Performance measures and timelines are not well defined
- Weak detail on relationship between principal and ESP
- Termination provisions seem to provide limited capacity of board to terminate contract

Additional comments of note from peer reviewers:

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