

Maine Charter School Commission

Lewiston-Auburn Academy Charter School

Findings Report

March 3, 2014

Amended Findings Approved March 3, 2014.

The Lewiston-Auburn Academy Charter School is to be a replication of the Pioneer Charter School of Science in Everett, Massachusetts. The application presented a clear, focused, compelling mission statement that defined the purpose of the school. There was a strong emphasis on STEM education balanced with the humanities. The applicant demonstrated knowledge of the diverse cultural background of the community it would serve. They presented a viable plan for curriculum development of the core academic areas consistent with the school's mission, values and educational program design and clearly demonstrated why there is a need for a STEM program in the Lewiston-Auburn area. They presented a strong desire for high quality education leading to college. Furthermore, a strong discipline and anti-bullying policy was presented to provide a safe and welcoming environment for structured learning.

Current students from the Pioneer School Charter School of Science were present at two separate hearings and unanimously extolled the virtues of the school and the difference it had made in their lives. They all have received acceptance letters from a number of high quality colleges in and around New England.

As with most applications, the Commission has received both letters of support and requests for rejection of the application. Every letter, e-mail and phone message was vetted by as many sources as could be reached. The subcommittee was satisfied with our inquiries.

It is the recommendation of the subcommittee that the application of the Lewiston-Auburn Academy Charter School be denied.

Concerns with the Lewiston/Auburn Academy Charter School Application

A. Educational Program

1. Lack of Alignment to Maine Learning Results

The application states the school will “use the curriculum and instructional methods developed and implemented at PCSS (the model school).” The model school is based in Massachusetts and therefore the curriculum used at that school is aligned to the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks as opposed to the Maine Learning Results. Although the Charter School’s Board has given assurances to the Commission that the work of aligning the curriculum be completed prior to opening it is difficult to approve a school based on work to be completed in the future.

2. Graduation Standards do not support Maine’s Proficiency-Based Diploma

Maine Statute 4722-A. Proficiency-based diploma standards that states: Beginning January 1, 2017, a diploma indicating graduation from a secondary school must be based on student demonstration of proficiency as described in this section. The commissioner may permit a school administrative unit to award diplomas under this section prior to January 1, 2017 if the commissioner finds that the unit’s plan for awarding diplomas meets the criteria for proficiency-based graduation under this section (2011, c. 669, 7 (NEW)).

The school’s method of determining promotion and therefore graduation is based on the earning of “marks” or grades as opposed to demonstrating proficiency in a subject area. When questioned, the Board members appeared to be unaware of this requirement.

3. Lack of Alignment to Maine’s Assessment System

The application states “the MeCAS will be administered according to the DOE schedule: MeCAS Math: Grades 7, 8 and 10; MeCAS Science: Grades 8 and 10: MeCAS ELA grades 7, 8,

and 10". This assessment schedule does not align with the Maine Comprehensive Assessment System. This oversight brings into question the applicant's understanding of the Maine Assessment educational system.

4. Meeting the Needs of Diverse Learners

The school's budget calls for two FTE Special Education Teachers throughout the first three years of operation. Based on the school's estimation of 15% of their population requiring Special Education services, this would result in a student to teacher ratio of 14 to 1 in year one; 18 to 1 in year two and 22.5 to 1 in year three.

In Tab 3 the school provides a sample English Language Education Parental Waiver Policy based on Massachusetts General Laws. However, Maine law requires that parent refusal of ELL services be documented, however, it "does not release the school or School Administrative Unit from its responsibility for providing meaningful education to the English Learner.

B. Organizational Plan

Although the plan to ensure parental involvement was well documented in the application, there is a need to demonstrate how Lewiston-Auburn Academy Charter School will involve the greater community.

C. Governance

1. Board Capacity

Although the application does not clearly state the total number of board members the school intends to have when operating, there are currently only seven members, one being a paid employee of Pioneer Charter School and who does not reside in the state of Maine. (p. 91). The committee is not confident that the board has the capacity to create, open, and operate a high performing school.

2. Board Diversity

Although there appears a good understanding of diverse roles needed on board, there is currently a lack of expertise in the areas of law and finance. Additionally, based on the resumes

shared behind Tab 30, only two of the current board members, Fatuma Hussein and Christine Richards, live within the Lewiston-Auburn catchment area.

The Commission finds that the applicant provided materially false and misleading information to the Commission in its application, which while later corrected by the applicant, was only done so in response to the falsity being revealed by opponents; including:

representing that it had received letters of support from a former mayor of Lewiston, a city of Lewiston's economic development coordinator and a leading faculty member of Bates College.

D. Business and Financial

1. Facilities Preparation

The Commission lacks confidence that the school will be able to execute a lease with the Charter School Development Corporation which will provide sufficient time to purchase land, secure all necessary permits, and erect a building in time for the opening of school.

The following documents are samples from the Pioneer Charter School of Science in Everett, Massachusetts. These documents may or may not represent Maine statutes and requirements and need to be carefully reviewed.

Tab 2: Notice of Procedural Safeguards

Tab 6: Child Study Team Referral Form

Tab 7: Draft Complaint Procedures

Tab 11: Student Handbook

Tab 15: Multi-Hazard Evacuation Plan

Tab 16: Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan

Tab 18: Student Weekly Schedules

Tab 22: Staff Handbook