

Maine Academy of Natural Sciences
Threshold
90-Day Visit
December 15, 2017

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On December 15, 2017, the Maine Charter School Commission (MCSC) Review Team for Maine Academy of Natural Sciences (MeANS) and MCSC and DOE staff met at MeANS to review the school's implementation of the new Threshold Program. Topics discussed at the visit included enrollment, staffing and programming, finances, success and struggles.

Enrollment

The Threshold Program started in September 2017 with 21 students enrolled. Since then, one student withdrew due to changes in her life outside of school. Three current Threshold students are expected to graduate this month. The school still plans to add another 20 students to the program for the next school year.

Staffing and Programming

The Threshold Program is staffed by two teachers who meet the students in their home once weekly. It is reported that special education staffing levels have been a challenge. The school has hired an additional special education teacher who will begin after the December vacation. This new position will be the case manager for Threshold students with an IEP.

Individualization allows Threshold teachers to accommodate for varied student learning styles. Students work independently and in consultation with their teacher during the week. Communication is via phone, email, and google docs. Regular consultation with the special education teacher will take place regularly on Friday afternoons during staff meeting times. The special education teacher will be available on the Mondays when Threshold students go to MeANS for social skill activities. This will facilitate the completion of individual transition planning work.

Student progress and success is measured through monitoring progress on targets, meeting individual academic goals and graduation timeline, as well as achieving growth on the NWEA.

The administration reports that approximately 41% of Threshold students have been making steady progress on their targets and standards. Another 41% have been making sporadic progress, and 18% have been mostly unengaged – cancelling most appointments, not turning in any work. It is reported that students who are not engaging, have either had a previous break in schooling related to dropping out, major mental health or life challenges, or major truancy issues.

Finances

The school reports that the Threshold program is currently under budget.

Successes

The school reported the following as some of Threshold's greatest successes so far:

- Making a connection with students who have not been in school for months, and/or who have no high school credits despite being a sophomore or higher.

- Helping a student who is a teen mother complete her standards so that she can begin applying to colleges and follow the career path she is interested in.
- Working with students to enroll in tuition waiver classes at KVCC for the spring semester--three are registered for online Tech Writing, one in College Comp, and two (including one with an infant daughter and one who aspires to work with young children who have disabilities) in Intro to Childhood Ed. They will receive support in these classes and earn MeANS standards through Threshold.
- Getting students re-engaged in their high school careers through high interest, personally relevant content areas such as North Korea, writing self-reflective/autobiographical pieces, etc.
- Finding a homeless student a safe and secure place to live and continue with the school.
- Building partnerships with programs such as the PTO (pathways to opportunity) and resources in surrounding communities that can support students in difficult situations.
- Building a team with parents/guardians, state caseworkers, and section 28 workers to help students become successful.
- Seeing students re-engage in learning and set ambitious goals for themselves such as early graduation, or make-up time to graduate on time.

Struggles

The school reported the following as some of Threshold's greatest struggles so far:

- Working with students who continue to avoid engaging – cancelling appointments frequently, not working between learning sessions.
- Chaotic living situations and challenges creating an avalanche of factors that take students off track.
- High level of academic, emotional, and behavioral needs combined with a lack of ability to complete work independently leading to limited progress.

Maine Academy of Natural Sciences has grown in its sixth year to include a program for underserved students. Many of the students who have enrolled in the work-at-home program have significant barriers to completing their education such as anxiety, mental illness, teen parenting, unstable home life, and others. The Maine Charter School Commission believes the Threshold program is making progress in its implementation as it continues to explore ways to educate its at-risk population.