

Monitoring Report
Harpswell Coastal Academy
November, 2013

Introduction

The Harpswell Coastal Academy (HCA) is one of the three public charter school authorized to begin its first year as a charter school in September 2013. HCA offers personalized project based education, a first of its kind for Mid-Coast Maine students in grades 6-12.

HCA is located on Ash Point Rd. Harpswell, Maine. Its initial enrollment of 57 students in grades 6 and 9 is gathered from 11 different communities from Yarmouth to Woolwich and Wiscasset. 33 students are in 6th grade with 24 in the 9th grade. 13 of the students attending currently have IEP's.

HCA implements a standards-based teaching and learning program - relevant, place-based curriculum that incorporates fieldwork and internships; and deliberate structures for building students' character and holding them accountable. HCA's organizational structure supports students in achieving high standards in a variety of ways – a longer school day, Saturday “intensives,” and community mentors for each student. The curriculum and the instructional program are both imbedded in a hands-on learning approach, utilizing an agricultural and natural science oriented environment. Along with the hands-on, individualized instruction, the school emphasizes its Restorative Justice program, designed to help students develop into self-directed learners responsible for their actions.

Process for Monitoring the Public Charter School

The Maine Charter School Commission established a visiting review team of three members accompanied by the MCSC Executive Director and two-person team from the Division of Special Education at the Maine Dept. of Education. The Commission team conducted its first scheduled on-site visit November 8, 2013. Along with the visit the review team received several paper documents as part of the review process. These documents were delivered prior to the visit, on the day of the visit, and subsequent to the visit, but prior to the development of this report. A list of documents provided by the school as part of this report is attached as an addendum and is available from the MCSC office. A list of the review team members and a list of all persons interviewed in the August review are included at the end of this report.

Parents:

Parents love the school and how the faculty and staff invest in their children. They are very supportive and patient understanding there are details the faculty and staff are still working out. There is an active parent

group. 20+ parents were in attendance and well vested in our team visit. They especially appreciated the difference in their child's attitude about school in general and for many they see their child has a new desire to be motivated for school. They had a positive reaction to what is happening at the school, the diverse student body, and that some children who never showed interest in learning are now researching information at home due to simple curiosity.

However, as with any new endeavor, there are some areas that need to be worked out. Concerns expressed by parents include communication to the parents. For example they would like specific communication about the safety plan. They also desire a full understanding of the paperless philosophy and its inner workings. Parents are craving feedback on many levels. The issue of having more enrichment offerings came up with requests for Foreign Language, Music, Theater and Art. Several expressed concern their children have too much computer time. Parents were unsure how their children were actually performing as the Parent Portal was inaccessible at the time of our visit. Despite these issues, parents expressed patience for some of their concerns to be worked out. Improved communication between school and home communication is imperative.

Students:

Students are very engaged on many levels from academic to building maintenance. Their field work at the Marsh represents the mission being carried out with students. Students in many aspects are very engaged. It was easy to understand student's growth already in observation skills, a primary scientific investigation skill through their marsh field work. This represents the mission being carried out with students and teachers. Students showed great pride and enthusiasm for keeping their learning environment clean - in serving and cleaning lunch, as well as cleaning floors, bathrooms. Students expressed excitement about the methods with which they are allowed to learn, as a 6th grader aptly stated this is how 'information is permanently cementing in my brain'. One student stated her desire was to become a teacher and work at HCA. Another expressed her growth in self-confidence due to the safe environment and encouragement by teachers and students. Others expressed enthusiasm for the various clubs they are able to start and the mentor volunteers who work with them to actually achieve specific skills such as interviewing, writing articles and engaging in discussions, as we witnessed.

Volunteers/Partners:

The current volunteers are engaged and enthusiastic. Their support includes: Amy Aloe runs the School House Café where students are learning about food preparation and all that is involved with the business of the café. One student stated, "On a scale of 1-10, the food here is a 13." John Anthony has a sailing club that is being launched as well in addition to other nautical pursuits such as Lobster Boat Rides and Oyster Fishing. Rob Logan (a professional artist) will be offering Art once a week for starters which will include painting, drawing, sculpting, design etc. Amy Haible is coordinating the efforts for students wanting to be journalists as

they are learning to conduct interviews etc. Yoga is being offered as well by Audrey Palma. Cider pressing is a seasonal endeavor that began this fall.

Teachers:

“I get to teach how I dreamed I always wanted to.” “Challenges of starting a school are liberating.” “We’re in it for the long haul.” All these are statements by an engaged, committed and success oriented faculty. They spoke to the emerging student co-ownership in their learning and educational environment which include the student, parents, teachers and board. JumpRope is the centerpiece to tracking each student specifically for the proficiency based model of teaching. They compile summative data on a daily basis for every student making it possible to group students, support, show standard progress, as well as attendance. The parent’s portal is still in process of being launched but the teachers needed some data in the system first. They will be explaining the details of this program and how they will be able to follow their child’s progress on a daily basis at the upcoming parent meeting. Aleks is being used to complement the in-person math class. They are finding this beneficial to supplement with 30 – 45 minute daily sessions listing the standards students have mastered/are working on/have not mastered. Classroom instruction covers the basic math concepts and reinforces their case studies with math and science. The formal reporting period will be on a Trimester basis.

Governing Board:

This HCA Governing board seems to have invested members who believe they would all benefit from Boardmanship training. The Board is looking to expand their numbers from 9 to 15. They are looking to recruit specific skill sets. They will need to change their by-laws to reflect this change. They are working toward building more depth to the existing board. They have currently been conducting their meeting operations as a non-profit board rather than a public school board that is open to the public. Therefore some suggestions have been made; posting the agenda, posting the minutes once approved, encourage parents to attend as it is open to the public. Parent involvement is not only encouraged, but necessary. There is a recommendation to have a sign in list of parent and public attendance to said meeting to have on file. Public involvement is also essential and a record of activities or involvement should also be maintained. Reference was made to the creation of a Founder’s Campaign to enhance their fundraising efforts. The community has been responsive in their recent fundraising efforts by exceeding their goal of \$135,000 by \$2,000.

Administration:

There has been a positive change with the school leader released from transporting students to teaching responsibilities and a focus on administration, fundraising. Parent partnership with the establishing of a Parent Advisory Committee engages parents who are eager and look for opportunities to work with students in a variety of capacities; Yoga & Art and looking for more opportunities. The efforts are deliberate to assure success with parent involvement.

Special Education:

25% of students are Sp-Ed with IEP's. SAD 75 collaborates with HCA with weekly OT & PT. There is a need for a Sp-Ed Literacy specialist. Reading levels require specific intervention. The plan is to add a ½ time Humanities teacher and ½ time Sp-Ed teacher. This would allow the Head of School to step out of the teaching role to focus on the Administrative responsibilities. This will add \$40,000- \$50,000 to the budget. The board has approved funding these additional positions and is focused on raising the funds. DOE Special Ed site visit members are assisting the school with the application process for securing available special education funding, as the first application deadline to secure these funds was missed.

Assessments:

All the minute details involved with starting a school are quite overwhelming at times as there can be a sense that administratively a tidal wave has hit. With that being said, certain details do have to be taken care of. With the NECAP testing designated on HCA's performance indicators as the choice of assessment for the first year, this was not possible since those tests are submitted to 5th and 8th graders respectively. Since HCA has enrolled only 6th and 9th grades assessments have been an oversight. Some measure of assessment is required and it is therefore the commission's request that an alternative form of assessment be completed this academic school year. Within 3 months (March 1, 2014) an alternative assessment plan must be submitted to the MCSC. This will reflect a material change to the contract and must be submitted in writing.

Facility:

Students participate in much of the maintenance of the building. They all pitch in and have their tasks of cleaning and organizing. This is proving to have many unexpected benefits as students recognize that the space belongs to them and they have a sense of ownership while at the same time learning to sweep, vacuum, clean and tidy up.

Closing Summary

In our estimation the Harpswell Coastal Academy is making progress in achieving its goal:

“...of cultivating a place-based and project-based educational environment tailored to meet the needs of our students. The core curriculum is reinforced with problem solving, task prioritization, and accountability of expectations while students become immersed in a scholastic culture of social and intellectual integrity, creativity and civic involvement.

HCA has made a strong effort in working toward this goal as the school year gets started.

Respectfully submitted,

Heidi Sampson (HCA Review Chair)

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