



## **Fiddlehead School of Arts & Sciences**

25 Shaker Road, Gray, ME 04039



ANNUAL MONITORING REPORT 2020-21

October 2021



**Mission**

To unfold the potential of children, in a respectful, loving culture through authentic and meaningful experiences that sustain a sense of wonder, a love of learning and embrace the interconnectedness of all things.

**Vision**

To provide for the foundational needs of growing children in a community where children, teachers, and families learn together in a nurturing environment.

**Governing Board**

Sally Morris, Board Chair  
Ben Kramer, Board Treasurer  
Carolyn Beem, Board Member  
Douglas Lynch, Board Member

Susan Doughty, Board Member  
Kimberly Allen, Board Member  
Dr. Joseph Mattos, Board Member

**Leadership Team**

Jacinda Cotton-Castro, Executive Director  
Mara Wiggin, Educational Program Director

Lee Ann Arnold, Special Education Director

**SCHOOL PROFILE**

Year Opened	Years in Operation	Grades served
2013	9	Pre-K through 8th
Number of Sending Districts*	Current Enrollment*	Students on Waiting List*
*(as of October 2021, Certified Student Enrollment Date)	*(as of October 2021, Certified Student Enrollment Date)	*(as of October 2021, Certified Student Enrollment Date)

School Year 2020 – 2021 Demographic Table			
Grade Level Enrollment			
	PK	15	9%
	K	21	12%
	1	19	11%
	2	21	12%
	3	21	12%
	4	20	12%
	5	21	12%
	6	20	12%
	7	14	8%
Gender			
	Female	86	50%
	Male	86	50%
Race/Ethnicity			
	White	159	92%
	AI/Alaska Native	1	>1%
	BAA	6	3%
	Latino/Hispanic	1	>1%
	Two or more races	5	3%
Special Education			
	Students with IEPs	36	21%
	General education students	136	79%
Economically Disadvantaged			
	Yes	42	24%
	No	130	76%

## Executive Summary

The Maine Charter School Commission is the Authorizer of 10 charter districts. Each charter district holds a contract with the Commission containing a Performance Framework of indicators and targets the district shall meet. The charter districts are evaluated and reported on annually as required by law.

District data are gathered through the Maine Department of Education, Charter Districts, and Site Visits, as applicable.

The Maine Charter School Commission has established a monitoring visit table for visit frequency and intensity. A copy of the Site Visit Manual can be found [here](#). Fiddlehead School was on cycle to have a Site Visit at the end of the 2020-21 school year and the Site Visit Report can be found on page 12.

Key documents and other information reviewed to determine progress on the charter district's performance framework and alignment with its mission are as follows:

- School calendar
- Current enrollment and demographics
- Staff roster
- Current organizational chart
- Board meeting minutes
- Board member meeting attendance
- School's strategic plan [as applicable]
- Current Education Service Provider contract [as applicable]
- Professional Development calendar and agendas [as applicable]
- Staff evaluation tool
- Administrator evaluation tool used by governing board
- Panorama school climate survey results
- School's self-assessment
- Previous year's monitoring report [as applicable]
- School's performance framework
- Copies of current recruitment materials
- Student enrollment application

Fiddlehead School of Arts and Sciences had success with student enrollment throughout the school year, student re-enrollment from one year to the next, board governance, and facilities management.

Document review is a major component of the Maine Charter School Commission's monitoring process, which happens throughout the year. Charter districts are required to submit reports and data for review. The table below summarizes the charter district's report and data submission completion throughout the 2020-2021 school year.



As a result of the 2020-2021 monitoring process, the charter district is encouraged to consider the following:

### GOVERNING PRACTICES

- Complete a Long-Term Plan, including assessment of facility needs, before adding more debt.

- The board is encouraged to continue to assess teacher salaries and adjust accordingly in order to retain qualified staff.

#### FINANCIAL PLANNING AND SUSTAINABILITY

- The governing board needs to develop a process for long-term strategic and financial planning so that it is a consistent agenda item at board meetings and focuses the board's attention to long-term sustainability and excellence.
- The school should complete a financial close and prepare financial statements each month for the Board to review.
- The school should improve timeliness of financial reporting to the Maine Charter School Commission.
- School and Board should review how FY21 COVID relief funding was spent and be sure that FY22 budgets do not rely on a repeat of this funding.

#### ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT AND GROWTH

- Given the impact of the pandemic and lower academic growth than in previous years, the charter organization should develop clear and specific strategies for closing learning gaps to ensure students are prepared for rigorous academic work.
- Teachers should be provided with support to ensure lessons have measurable outcomes that can be analyzed for mastery and used to plan student support.

#### STUDENT ATTENDANCE AND ENROLLMENT

- Student attendance continues to be low at FSAS. The school is encouraged to develop a plan for increasing family and student awareness of the importance of attendance.

**School performance should be considered in the context of a global health crisis, which schools were battling throughout the 2020 - 2021 school year.** Students and families grappled with job loss, health concerns and insecurities, and anxiety related to the pandemic. Schools continued to serve students and families despite the COVID-19 crisis. That service often meant that schools focused on the basic needs of students like social-emotional well-being and psychological health while also managing a rigorous academic program. Because of the operational challenges that the pandemic caused, the school likely saw less growth in student achievement than they otherwise might in a pandemic-free environment. All schools faced similar challenges which is why there is a broad focus on learning loss in the educational ecosystem and media. The Charter Commission is closely monitoring academic progress throughout the school year. The Charter Commission applauds the effort of the school to ensure a safe environment for students in which their basic needs were met during the 2020 - 2021 school year.

In the 2020-2021 school year, the Maine Department of Education adopted the NWEA MAP test as the “state assessment.” The MDOE did not assign targets or expectations related to assessment results. The Maine Charter School Commission amended the Performance Framework to require schools to submit results along with analysis. The MDOE has not released MAP data for traditional schools, which precludes the ability of the public to compare performance between charter schools and their traditional counterparts. Given the trajectory of the school’s performance over the last several years, the Charter Commission remains confident in the ability of the school to serve its students and families in accordance with the contract between the parties.

PERFORMANCE INDICATOR SUMMARY TABLE		
Indicator	Details	Performance
Academic Achievement		
Proficiency on State Assessments in reading	The school will collect baseline data on the NWEA MAP test for ELA and will provide school wide results as well as results at each grade level assessed.	School collected baseline data on the NWEA MAP test for ELA and provided school wide results at each grade level

Proficiency on State Assessments in math	The school will collect baseline data on the NWEA MAP test for math and will provide school wide results as well as results at each grade level assessed.	School collected baseline data on the NWEA MAP test for math and provided school wide results as well as results at each grade level
<b>Academic Growth</b>		
ELA MAP growth	Growth in their MAP RIT <sup>1</sup> scores from fall to spring of each school year.	<b>64%</b>
Math MAP growth	Growth in their MAP RIIT scores from fall to spring of each year.	<b>84%</b>
Growth on NWEA as measured by projected growth on MAP <sup>2</sup> assessment	60% of eligible <sup>3</sup> students meeting their projected growth on NWEA ELA reading and language by the end of school year 2022-23	<b>32%</b>
Growth on NWEA as measured by projected growth on MAP assessment	60% of eligible <sup>4</sup> students meeting their projected growth on NWEA math by the end of school year 2022-23	<b>36%</b>
<b>Achievement Gaps</b>		
Achievement gaps in proficiency between major subgroups on the Maine State Assessments.	The school will provide evidence of closing identified achievement gaps of major subgroups (English learner, special education, gender, economically disadvantaged, 504, ethnic and racial minorities).	Partially Meets Expectation: Subgroups are performing below comparison groups, some gaps have closed since the previous year
Achievement gaps in growth between major subgroups on the NWEA.	The school will provide evidence of closing identified gaps of major subgroups (English learner, special education, gender, economically disadvantaged, 504, ethnic and racial minorities).	Partially Meets Expectation: Subgroups are performing below comparison groups, some gaps have closed since the previous year
<b>Student Attendance</b>		
Chronic absenteeism rate	10% or fewer students classified as chronically absent on the last day of school.	<b>28.5%</b> Does not meet Expectation
Average Daily Attendance Rate	Average daily attendance rate in grades K-8 of 93% or higher.	<b>88.3%</b> Does Not Meet Expectation: Below 90%
<b>Student Enrollment</b>		
Enrollment throughout the school year	85% or more of eligible students enrolled on the last day of school will be the same students who were enrolled on State Student Count Day.	<b>99%</b> Exceeds Expectation: 90% or more
Recurrent enrollment from one year to the next	85% or more of eligible students enrolled on the <u>last day</u> of school will have completed an Intent to Reenroll form for the next year.	<b>90%</b> Exceeds Expectation: 90% or more
<b>Financial Performance and Stability</b>		
<b>Near Term Measures</b> a) Current Ration B) Unrestricted Days Cash on Hand	School evaluates its Near-Term Financial Health using the Financial Performance and Stability outline provided by the Commission.	<b>Pending Audit</b>
<b>Sustainability Measures</b> a) Total Margin B) Debt to asset ratio	School evaluates its Financial Sustainability using the Financial Performance and Stability outline provided by the Commission.	<b>Pending Audit</b>

<sup>1</sup> The RIT score represents a student's achievement level at any given moment and helps measure their academic growth over time. The RIT scale is a stable scale, like feet and inches, that accurately measures student performance, regardless of age, grades, or grade level.

<sup>2</sup> MAP® Growth™ measures what students know and informs what they're ready to learn next. By dynamically adjusting to each student's responses, MAP (measures of academic progress) Growth creates a personalized assessment experience that accurately measures performance.

<sup>3</sup> Eligible is defined as having both a fall and spring score for students in grades K-11.

<sup>4</sup> Eligible is defined as having both a fall and spring score for students in grades K-10.

The school has an annual financial audit conducted. Audit and management letter are submitted to the Commission. Audit has no material findings or misstatements.	Unmodified opinion on [consolidated] financial statements; no material weaknesses, significant deficiencies or reportable instances of noncompliance and other matters identified in the other information accompanying the auditor's report on financial statements or in the auditor's report on internal control over financial reporting and on compliance and other matters.	<b>Pending Audit</b>
<b>Board Governance and Stewardship</b>		
Public Accountability: Transparent, responsive, and legally compliant Board operation.	The Governing Board will hold a minimum of 6 meetings per school year.	<b>13 meetings held</b> Exceeds Expectation: 11 or more meetings
	Timely publication of Board meeting agenda and minutes upon approval.	Meets Expectation: All minutes and agendas posted timely
<b>Facilities Management</b>		
Meet Local and State requirements	The school certifies that its facility (or facilities) meet all local and state requirements for public school facilities.	Meets Expectation: Certified as required
Capital Improvement Plan	The school has a current Capital Improvement Plan approved by its governing board.	Meets Expectation: Current Capital Improvement Plan approved by board
<b>School Culture and Climate</b>		
Reporting of behavior incidents	The school will follow the Maine DOE required reporting for incidents of behavior.	Meets Expectation: Reports as required
Panorama Survey-Family Participation	40% of families will participate in the Panorama survey.	<b>Not Reported as Required</b>
Panorama Survey-Student Participation	65% of eligible students will participate in the Panorama survey	<b>63%</b> Partially Meets Expectation: 55% - 64.9%
Panorama Survey-Teacher/Staff Participation	70% of teachers/staff will participate in the Panorama survey	<b>78%</b> Meets Expectation: 70% - 79.9%
Panorama Survey	Annually, the school will review its Panorama Education results and develop an action plan to address areas for continued improvement. Plan and outcome will be submitted to the Commission.	* Survey was not conducted in 2020 due to COVID-19 pandemic. Plan not developed.

Reports will be updated once pending data is received.

## Site Visit Report

Monitoring Site Visits are based on both the criteria set forth in the school's performance framework and the school's alignment with its mission. The categories in the performance framework are student achievement, school climate and family engagement, governance, and finance.

The monitoring site visit was conducted on August 12, 2021 via Zoom. Team members used the Site Visit Manual to plan for and conduct the visit. Prior to the site visit, team members reviewed documents and other information related to the school's mission and performance framework.

The following participants from the Maine Charter School Commission conducted the monitoring site visit:

- Jeremy Jones, Executive Director, Maine Charter School Commission
- Gina Post, Chief Program Officer, Maine Charter School Commission
- Amy Allen, Operations Director, Maine Charter School Commission
- Mackenzie Wagner, Chief of Staff, Maine Charter School Commission
- Joe Drago, CPA Consultant, Maine Charter School Commission
- Jennifer Gleason, Maine Department of Education, Special Services

Focus group interviews were held with groups at the school. Groups were asked a standard set of questions as well as school specific questions created for this visit.

Focus group interviews held by the team:

- Governing Board: Sally Morris, Board Chair and William Doughty, Outgoing Board Chair
- School leaders/administrators: Jacinda Cotton-Castro, Executive Director, Mara Wiggin, Education Program Director, LeeAnn Arnold, Special Education Coordinator

## **Mission Alignment**

*FSAS has continued to remain focused on the “whole child” and emphasis of nature being an extension of the classroom.*

### **Governing Board**

The FSAS Governing Board representatives believe education is a service and that staff are knowledgeable about the delivery of the educational program. The board tracks and reacts to data that is gathered and presented by staff members. The board reports that their primary concern is remaining focused on the vision and mission while setting policies for staff on the delivery of the program.

### **Administrators**

In their reflection SY 20-21, the leadership team provided examples indicating a connection to nature and outdoor learning. The school purchased a yurt to increase opportunities to learn outside. Leaders reported strengthening community partnerships, but specific examples were not provided.

## **Student Achievement**

*Academic achievement and growth appear to be growth areas for FSAS as indicated in conversations with the board and school leaders.*

### **Governing Board**

The Board representatives do not think the 2020-21 school year provided a fair and accurate view of student achievement. They reported the pandemic taught them the school needs to raise “decent human beings” and expressed the importance of Social Emotional Learning (SEL) at school. These programs took priority over learning core academic skills.

While board representatives expressed pride in the academic units of instruction taught at the school, they added that they “would have a hard time” explaining what students have learned from those units. **Commission Staff expressed that academic achievement and growth are the core purpose of school and lessons should have measurable outcomes from which the staff can analyze mastery and plan for student support.**

Governing Board representatives estimated FSAS students lost six to eight months of instruction during the 2020-2021 school year, an estimate based on NWEA MAP assessments and anecdotal evidence from teachers. It is not clear to the Commission what data had been used to determine this estimated learning loss. NWEA MAP assessment results showed learning loss was greater in literacy than in math. Measurable goals for student progress were not provided.

An Educational Program Coordinator has been hired for the 2021-2022 school year; this position was previously titled Coordinator of Teaching and Learning.

During the 2020-2021 school year, Response to Intervention (RtI) continued and the school increased its RtI staff.

### **Administrators**

The school’s administration said they believe students did quite well considering the year we had, and that there was “there was a lot of learning going on.” When asked about MAP assessment results not reflecting this learning, the



administration indicated small class size makes it difficult to draw accurate conclusions about student achievement of a whole grade level.

The school's RtI process begins with using universal screeners and schoolwide benchmark testing. There is work being done to develop an easier way for teachers to bring concerns to an RtI meeting and have a plan to follow. If a student is not making progress with RtI support, the data are used to refer to special education as appropriate. The administration also reported learning loss is a concern for staff and families and that there has recently been an influx of special education referrals.

An RtI Handbook was developed a couple of years ago to outline the process. There are currently two full time RtI positions at the school and there is interest in adding additional staff.

The school has not developed specific outcomes that it expects from students at the drafting of this report, though they state that work for this is planned for early in the 2021-2022 school year.

While Average Daily Attendance (ADA) was high throughout the 2020-2021 school year, chronic absenteeism increased over last year. The administration said it was difficult to know what was considered "being present" with remote and hybrid learning happening along with in person learning and this uncertainty may have impacted chronic absenteeism rates. Another possible contribution to increased chronic absenteeism was transportation, which became difficult for parents who began working from home due to the pandemic. Transportation can be a barrier for families because of distance, and that the school works with families to accommodate transportation needs as it is able. They reported that for some families the commute can be up to an hour each way. FSAS owns one bus and does not have plans to purchase another.

### **School Climate and Family Engagement**

*The site visit showed evidence that Fiddlehead School is prioritizing a healthy school climate, but concerns were shared regarding teacher turnover.*

### **Governing Board**

FSAS has seen high staff turnover which the school reports is due to lower salaries than other area school districts.

Before the start of the 2020-2021 school year, all but one of the school's special education staff resigned, leaving the school understaffed and unable to provide all services for students. During the early months of the school year, the school was able to hire new staff and offer make-up services to any students who had not received them at the start of the school year.

The Finance committee of the Governing Board is currently looking at the teacher salary scales and reviewing what changes might be made to offer more competitive salaries to teachers, with hopes of being able to retain teachers.

During the 2020-2021 school year, a team of three board members, the Executive Director, and the school nurse met weekly to get through various issues that were related to the pandemic.

The Governing Board conducts an annual School Leadership Evaluation for the Executive Director. The process requires each board member to critique different areas of performance. The Executive Director did not receive a written evaluation, though the board representatives report a salary increase. A succession plan for the school's Executive Director is being developed.

### **Administrators**

FSAS has monitored student mental health using a tiered program for supporting students. An SEL curriculum is being explored as a possible addition to the school's programming.



In the 2020-2021 school year, the administrative team allowed teachers to “make sure kids were coming into school happy and healthy” and elevate student emotional and physiological needs before learning academic skills. They believe having small classroom enrollment helped support students.

Beginning in the 2021-2022 school year, staff and student wellness will be prioritized through efforts such as providing staff members a “floater” day to use when needed.

FSAS administration will resume using the Charlotte Danielson Framework for Teaching for teacher evaluation. The process was not used during the 2020-2021 school year.

The administration receives teacher feedback and gauges teacher satisfaction through the Commission sponsored Panorama School Climate Surveys and in weekly meetings with lead teachers.

As a result of the pandemic, FSAS created pods of teachers working together which will continue into the 2021-2022 school year and teachers from within each pod will meet weekly. Additionally, the Education Program Director will meet with individual teachers monthly.

## **A. Governance**

### **Governing Board**

The board has had some long-standing members term-out and has had some new members join. Some members who have left the board have remained active as members of committees, allowing the historical knowledge of the board to continue.

## **B. Finance**

*Fiddlehead School has implemented many sound financial practices. The school is encouraged to consider closing out each month's financials.*

### **Governing Board and Executive Director**

It was reported that the school ended FY 2021 with a surplus.

The board is planning a retreat to focus on long-term plans for additional programs that increase revenue. This will determine whether there will be a need for more space than what the school facility currently offers.

The board's finance committee has three board members and is led by the board treasurer and is supported by school staff. Regular reports are made to the board which include a high-level detail of the accounts, budget v actual report, cash flow report, profit and loss report, balance sheet, and budget forecast.

The board has two reserve accounts for facilities. Over the next five to seven years the board will balance out what needs to be in the accounts for major projects. Projects being considered include replacement of windows, improvement to the septic system, and parking lot and landscaping work.

### **Administrators**

The Administrative team expressed the building space will be tight and that there will have to be some creative uses of space. They indicated the off-site classes will help limit the number of students in the school at one time.

Student re-enrollment was reported to be good, while experiencing some fluctuation due to masking and vaccination requirements. When students unenroll, the school keeps track of who leaves and why.