



VISION

MAINE CHARTER SCHOOL
COMMISSION

All of Maine's children will have access to a vibrant ecosystem of diverse schools so that all of them can become happy, healthy and thriving citizens

ANNUAL MONITORING REPORT 2021-22 December 2022



MAINE
CONNECTIONS
ACADEMY

8 Science Park Road, Floor #3, Scarborough, ME 04074

Received by Commission on 1.10.23

MISSION

The mission of Maine Connections Academy (MCA) is to help each student maximize his or her potential and meet the highest performance standards through a uniquely individualized learning program in grades 7-12 throughout the state of Maine for students who need an alternative to the traditional classroom.

VISION

The vision of MCA will be to reach students for whom a cutting-edge virtual approach provides the very best pathway to school success through a uniquely individualized learning program that combines the best in virtual education with very real connections among students, family, teachers, and the community to promote academic and emotional success for every learner.

GOVERNING BOARD

Billy Thompson, Interim President
Jennifer Cummings, Treasurer
Ellen McBride

Connie Ronco
Jana Lapoint

LEADERSHIP TEAM

Walter Wallace, Principal
Lauren Thompson, Assistant Principal

Patricia Kiely, Special Education Director
Katherine Hutchinson, Coordinator of School Counseling

SCHOOL PROFILE

School Year Opened	Years in Operation	Grades served
2014-15	9	7 – 12
Number of Sending Districts*	Current Enrollment*	Students on Waiting List*
118 (as of October 2022, Certified Student Enrollment Date)	466 (as of October 2022, Certified Student Enrollment Date)	93 (as of October 2022, Certified Student Enrollment Date)

School Year 2021 – 2022 Demographic Table

<u>Grade Level Enrollment</u>			
	7	66	14.1%
	8	76	16.2%
	9	88	18.8%
	10	89	18.9%
	11	82	17.5%
	12	68	14.5%
<u>Gender</u>			
	Female	283	60.3%
	Male	186	39.7%
<u>Race/Ethnicity</u>			
	White	430	91.6%
	American Indian/Alaska Native	4	0.9%
	Asian/Pacific Islander	4	0.9%
	Black or African American	11	2.3%
	Latino/Hispanic	4	0.9%
	Two or more races	16	3.4%
<u>Special Education</u>			
	Students with IEPs	84	17.9%
	General education students	385	82.1%
<u>Economically Disadvantaged</u>			
	Yes	182	38.8%
	No	287	61.2%

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.

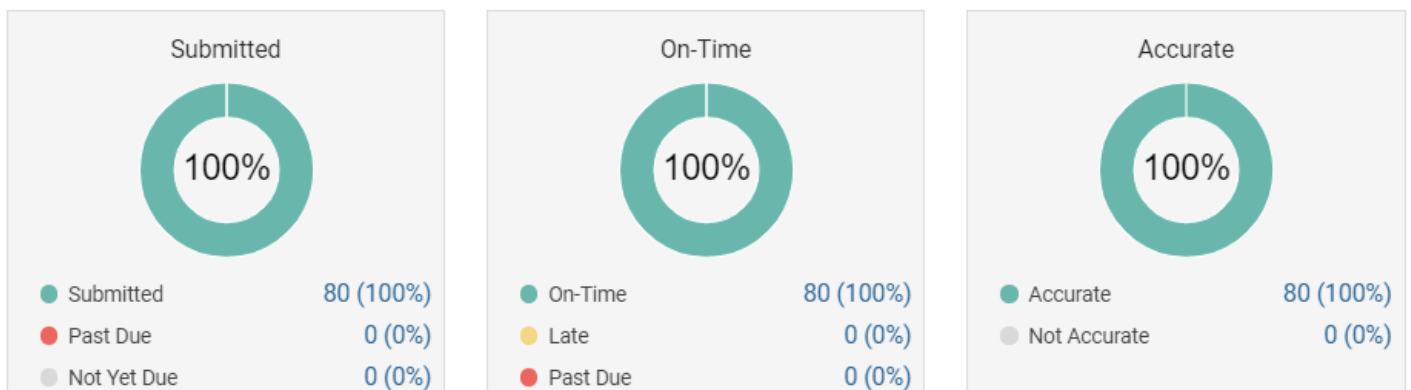
Maine Connections Academy was not on cycle to have a Site Visit at the end of the 2020-21 school year. The Maine Charter School Commission has established a monitoring visit table for visit frequency and intensity. A copy of the Site Visit Manual can be found [here](#). Maine Connections Academy was on cycle to have a Site Visit at the end of the 2021-22 school year and the Site Visit Report can be found on page 14.

Key documents and other information reviewed to determine progress on the school'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

In school year 2021-2022, Maine Connections Academy had success with average daily attendance, post-secondary activity participation and successful completion, and school climate survey participation.

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 2021-2022 school year.



As a result of the 2021-2022 monitoring process, the charter district is encouraged to consider the following:

ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT AND GROWTH

- Given the impact of the pandemic on academic growth, Maine Connections Academy should develop clear and specific strategies for closing learning gaps to ensure students are prepared for rigorous academic work, particularly in the area of math.

FINANCIAL PLANNING AND SUSTAINABILITY

- With limited enrollment growth and increasing costs, we recommend a review of planned deficit results to ensure sufficient cash is retained and that efforts continue to further develop philanthropy.

Exceeded Expectation	Met Expectation	Partially Met Expectation	Did Not Meet Expectation
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PERFORMANCE INDICATORS SUMMARY TABLE		
INDICATOR	DETAILS	PERFORMANCE
Academic Proficiency		
Proficiency on state assessment in reading	Collect baseline data on the MAP test for ELA and will provide school wide results as well as results at each grade level assessed	Met Expectation Reported as required
Proficiency on state assessment in math	Collect baseline data on the MAP test for math and will provide school wide results as well as results at each grade level assessed	Met Expectation Reported as required
Academic Growth		
Growth in English Language Arts, reading and communication skills	Students will show progress in their learning through growth in their MAP RIT scores from fall to spring of each year	Did Not Meet Expectation 47%
Growth in mathematics and reasoning skills	Students will show progress in their learning through growth in their MAP RIT ¹ scores from fall to spring of each year	Did Not Meet Expectation 66%
Growth on MAP ² assessment	64% of eligible ³ students meeting their projected growth on NWEA ELA reading and language by the end of school year 2020-2021	Did Not Meet Expectation 41%
Growth on MAP assessment	66% of eligible ⁴ students meeting their projected growth on NWEA math by the end of school year 2020-2021	Did Not Meet Expectation 53%
Achievement Gaps		
Achievement gaps in proficiency between major subgroups on the Maine State Assessments.	The school will provide evidence of closing identified achievement gaps on major subgroups (English learner, special education, gender, economically disadvantaged, 504, ethnic and racial minorities)	Partially Met Expectation <i>Subgroups are performing below comparison groups: the FRL subgroups met projected RIT at a lower rate in math than the comparison group, males met projected RIT at a lower rate than females in math and reading.</i>

¹ The RIT score represents a student's achievement level at any given moment and help 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.

² 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.

³ Eligible is defined as having both a fall and spring score for students in Grades K-11.

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

Achievement gaps in growth between major subgroups on the NWEA.	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 Met Expectation <i>Subgroups are performing below comparison groups: the FRL subgroups met projected RIT at a lower rate in math than the comparison group, males met projected RIT at a lower rate than females in math and reading.</i>
Student Attendance		
Chronic absenteeism rate	10% or fewer students classified as chronically absent on the last day of school ⁵	Pending MDOE
Average Daily Attendance Rate	Average daily attendance rate in grades K-8 of 93% or higher	Exceeded Expectation 97%
Average Daily Attendance Rate	Average daily attendance rate in grades 9-12 of 91% or higher	Exceeded Expectation 96%
Student Enrollment		
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 ⁶	Exceeded Expectation 98%
Recurrent enrollment from one year to the next	85% or more of eligible students enrolled on the last day of school will have completed an Intent to Reenroll form for the next year	Exceeded Expectation 100%
Post-Secondary Readiness		
4-year high school graduation rate (current cohort)	Schools will meet Maine DOE annual goals: 2020 – 87.74%	Pending MDOE
5 and 6-year average high school graduation rate (previous 2 years' cohorts averaged)	Schools will meet Maine DOE annual goals: 2020 – 89.74%	Pending MDOE
Of students in their graduating year, percent participation in post-secondary readiness opportunities	At the end of their graduating year, 70% of each schools' eligible ⁷ students will have participated in at least one post-secondary activity such as (and not limited to) college course, Advanced Placement course, certificate program, or internship	Exceeded Expectation 100%
Success rate of students participating in post-secondary readiness	70% of the school's students <u>who participated in at least one post-secondary activity</u> such as (and not limited to) college course, Advanced Placement course, certification program, or internship will complete it successfully ⁸	Exceeded Expectation 97%
Financial Performance and Stability		
Near Term Measures a) Current Ratio b) Unrestricted Days Cash on Hand	School evaluates its Near-Term Financial Health using the Financial Performance and Stability outline provided by the Commission	Pending Audit
Sustainability Measures a) Total Margin b) Debt to asset ratio	School evaluates its Financial Sustainability using the Financial Performance and Stability outline provided by the Commission	Pending Audit
The school has an annual financial audit conducted. Audit and management letter are submitted to the Commission.	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	Pending Audit

⁵ Chronically absent is defined as missing 10% or more of school days.

⁶ State Student Count Day is October 1.

⁷ Students not excluded via IEP or other individual plan

⁸ Successfully is defined as a passing grade, meeting appropriate standards, or other clearly defined measure of success.

Audit has no material findings or misstatements	report on financial statements or in the auditor's report on internal control over financial reporting and on compliance and other matters	
Board Governance and Stewardship		
Public Accountability: Transparent, responsive, and legally compliant Board operation	The Governing Board will hold a minimum of 6 meetings per school year ⁹	Met Expectation <i>7 Meetings Held</i>
	Timely ¹⁰ publication of Board meeting agenda and minutes upon approval	Met Expectation <i>All minutes and agendas posted timely</i>
Facilities Management		
Meet Local and State requirements	The school certifies that its facility (or facilities) meets all local and state requirements for public school facilities	Met Expectation <i>Certified as required</i>
Capital Improvement Plan	The school has a current Capital Improvement Plan approved by its governing board	Met Expectation <i>Capital Improvement Plan approved by board</i>
School culture and climate		
Reporting of behavior incidents	The school will follow the Maine DOE required reporting for incidents of behavior	Met Expectation <i>Reported as required</i>
Panorama Survey-Family Participation	40% of families will participate in the Panorama survey	Exceeded Expectation 55%
Panorama Survey-Student Participation	65% of eligible students will participate in the Panorama survey ¹¹	Exceeded Expectation 82%
Panorama Survey-Teacher/Staff Participation	70% of teachers/staff will participate in the Panorama survey	Exceeded Expectation 88%
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	Even though not required for the 2021-22 school year, the school developed an action plan.

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 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
- Lana Ewing, Chief of Staff, Maine Charter School Commission

⁹ A school year is July 1 – June 30

¹⁰ Timely is defined as posting agenda a minimum of 5 days before the meeting and for minutes, posting within 5 days of approval.

¹¹ Students in grades 3 and up are eligible to participate in the Panorama Education surveys.

The monitoring site visit was conducted on June 21, 2022 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.

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: Ellen McBride, Interim Board Chair and Jennifer Cummings, Board Treasurer
- School Leadership: Walter Wallace, Head of School, Lauren Thompson, Assistant Principal, Joy Kiely, Special Education Director

BOARD

Student Performance

The governing board representatives were asked to reflect on the student academic performance, including trends in strength and weakness. They reported the following strengths: ELA and social studies scores have improved, and Multiple Pathways position added to improve high school graduation rates. They identified math as an area for improvement.

In order to support student achievement, the board is:

- Employing a 1 FTE Social Worker
- Supporting the head of school
- Ensuring appropriate Professional Development opportunities are available
- Working to meet individual student needs

Governance

The governing board representatives were asked to identify the school's major success and current challenges. They identified the following successes/strengths:

- Recent graduation ceremonies
- Hiring of Multiple Pathways Teacher and the work he's done with students to increase graduation rate
- Support of students coming out of years impacted by COVID- extra social work support, care packages, hiring of an additional teacher
- Implementing the school's mission to meet students where they are
- Board is looking at the Strategic Plan

They identified the following as challenges:

- Recruiting new board members
- Student academic achievement
- Dealing with increased number of students with mental health needs
- Graduation rates

The board members shared that a strategic plan was built around four goals – (1) Ensure Student Success; (2) Retain Staff & Families; (3) Maintain Effective Governance and Fiscal Oversight; and (4) Build & Strengthen

Relationships - which are discussed at every board meeting. They expect this plan will be the building block for future discussions and planning, as well as for strengthening the school.

Finances are built into the strategic plan. The board treasurer meets with the CFO regularly.

The full board gets a P&L report, balance sheet and cash accounts report monthly. The budget is developed once a year, and quarterly reports are not provided. The treasurer and CFO review the monthly statements before they go to the full board. The board does not have a finance committee; as the board representatives stated they "just don't have the numbers [of board members]."

Monthly and quarterly reports provide the number of students enrolled, the number of student withdrawals, the number of students with Individual Education Plans (IEPs), the number of contacts with families, assessment data rates, and opportunities for staff. Additionally, at monthly board meetings, teachers present on events and activities happening at the school. The board representatives said the Head of School does "a wonderful job keeping us informed," and said they get enough information to make informed decisions.

In addition to monthly board meetings, the Head of School and Board Chairperson have a monthly meeting and communicate as needed outside of the meeting.

Board representatives were asked about major successes and challenges in MCA's relationship with Pearson, the provider of the school's learning platform, curriculum, and other services. They reported the board is "very pleased" with the relationship with Pearson.

While in the past there had been a discussion of reducing the facility and allowing more teachers to work from home, it was reported there are no immediate plans to make a change. MCA has two more years on the current lease agreement.

Board members are reaching out to their own networks to see if there is any interest.

The board would like to add at least one new member and ideally would like to add two more. In terms of skill sets, they feel an additional member with legal expertise would be beneficial.

The board evaluates the school leadership. Each board member compiles their thoughts for inclusion on one formal document. The board meets with the Head of School to discuss goals for the coming year. The board representatives said the board is "really appreciative" about the communication they receive from the Head of School, which makes the evaluation process "very easy".

The board evaluates itself by completing a survey at the beginning of each school year. The results are compiled and discussed during a day-long strategic planning session.

A few board members have begun the MCSC provided Epicenter Board training. The board has discussed the importance of the training and its inclusion as a requirement in the upcoming Performance Framework.

Finances

MCA board representatives were asked about budget planning. They said the board has been planning for the elimination of the grant funding and passed the FY23 budget at its May board meeting.

ADMINISTRATION

Staff

The Head of School reported that open staff positions are posted online and are also referred by current staff. Pearson provides support with the postings and collecting applications. Applicants complete a pre-interview screening online, which provides additional information prior to an interview. The hiring team includes a combination of administrators and teachers. The staff is fully hired.

New staff are onboarded using an online training system and are assigned a mentor who can answer questions and help with routine activities.

The head of school believes providing teachers lots of attention and bi-weekly meetings is important in developing and retaining quality staff.

Staff benefits include: work from home opportunities, health insurance, \$5,000 available annually for professional development coursework, meetings are held during the 8-4 school day, there is schedule flexibility, and a 401K option.

Staff participate in professional development opportunities throughout the school year. Opportunities are provided both online and in person training and have included professional development for Writing Workshop designed for MCA by USM, and interpreting data in SY 21-22. Additionally, the leadership team works with teachers who are struggling.

The school leadership team shares information and communicates with all staff members during a weekly staff meeting. Professional Development time is built into the schedule for every Wednesday.

Staff feedback is gathered from the Panorama School Climate Survey provided by the Maine Charter School Commission, the Pulse Survey provided by Pearson, and a mid-year feedback opportunity.

Student Academic

At the mid-year meeting the MCA leadership shared it had recently collected data about the number of students that enter the school after 9th grade with credit deficiency and how that trend impacts 4 and 5 year graduation rates. As a follow up to this conversation, the team was asked what the data showed and how it impacted planning. They said the data "wasn't surprising" and getting students to earn 22 credits for graduation is "an uphill climb". The MCA team added the newly created Multiple Pathways position was specifically designed for the students coming in credit deficient and for current students who are falling behind.

A new practice at MCA is to review a new student's transcript to determine what the student achieved, so at MCA the student can build on that, without repeating what had already been accomplished.

22 credits are required to graduate. MCA's leadership is evaluating the possibility of requiring fewer credits for graduation while still meeting the requirements of the state. If fewer credits are required, it is likely that it would be electives that would be decreased.

MCA leadership reported that they use internal and state assessments to measure student academic achievement and progress. They review passing rates (staff meet with supervisors to discuss school-related goals and individual student achievement); this helps to identify where gaps are and are re-evaluated every couple of weeks. They also review data at the subgroup level and dig deeper if gaps are discovered.

They reported results from NWEA MAP assessments: results on math and language usage increased from winter to spring; reading results decreased. At the time of the meeting, the leadership hadn't analyzed how the scores compare to course passing rates.

The school's Instructional Coach (stipend position) also provides support. The coach meets with the leadership to gain information and then meets with individual staff and departments to discuss data.

Student Support

In order to meet the learning needs of all students, the school has an advisory program. The advisory program assigns each teacher to a small group of students. The advisory teacher gets to know the students on an individual basis and learn what their needs are. This helps students connect with at least one teacher at the school.

MCA has intervention programs including Response to Intervention (RTI), social work services, a gifted and talented program and special education services.

Students are identified for interventions based on NWEA MAP results, staff recommendations, family requests, and Reading Plus Program data.

MCA also has a Student Support Team (SST) that meets with struggling students and their parents/guardians.

MCA has a special education referral process. The special education director indicated the number of family referrals has increased since the onset of COVID-19. There are about 81 students in the program; approximately 18-19% of the student population.

Social work, occupational therapy, physical therapy, speech and language, and behavioral services are all provided remotely.

MCA has only a few English Learners/Multilingual Learners. There is a certified EL teacher on staff (stipend position).

The head of school reported being evaluated annually by the governing board. Board members provide feedback and a report is generated including questions the school leader has reflected on. The board and head of school meet and review the report. The evaluation is shared with the Pearson contact for school leaders, who provides support and arranges opportunities for collaboration with other Pearson Connections peers.



MISSION

The mission of the Maine Charter School Commission is to authorize, monitor and develop unique public charter schools that provide a dynamic, superlative education for every student