



Maine Charter School Commission

Minutes

Monthly Commission Meeting

Date and Time

Tuesday February 13, 2024 at 1:00 PM

Location

Room #103, Cross Office Building, 111 Sewall Street, Augusta or via Zoom

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://mainestate.zoom.us/j/86500283769>

Meeting ID: 865 0028 3769

Passcode: 39679481

The **Vision** of the Maine Charter School Commission is that *"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."*

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."*

Reminders:

- This meeting is being recorded via Zoom.
- We ask members of the public to hold comments until public comments are heard.

Any person seeking special accommodation for the public meeting should contact Rachel Spell at (207)816-2187 or rachel.spell@maine.gov

Directors Present

Brian Langley (remote), James Ford (remote), Jim Handy, Leigh Albert, Norm Higgins, Tom Keller, Tori Kornfield

Directors Absent

None

Guests Present

Amy Allen (remote), Lana Ewing (remote), Rachel Spell

I. Opening Items

A. Record Attendance

B. Call the Meeting to Order

Norm Higgins called a meeting of the board of directors of Maine Charter School Commission to order on Tuesday Feb 13, 2024 at 1:07 PM.

C. To Consider the Approval of the 1/9/24 Commission Meeting

Jim Handy made a motion to approve the minutes from Monthly Commission Meeting on 01-09-24.

Leigh Albert seconded the motion.

* Meeting with committee on January 24th, will be addressed in comments.

The board **VOTED** to approve the motion.

Roll Call

Brian Langley Aye

Leigh Albert Aye

Tom Keller Aye

Norm Higgins Aye

Tori Kornfield Aye

Jim Handy Aye

James Ford Aye

II. Comments from Commission Chair

A. Comments

- No date with education committee just yet per Norm and that they will let him know.

- 02/14 Charter School Commission will be meeting at State Board to talk about School Performance. Lana will be Zooming in, Tom and Tori will be present over Zoom and Norm will be available in person. Opportunity to elevate conversation and recognize charter schools and their importance in Maine.
- Norm introduced Missy O'Neal (Department of Education's Director of Special Projects as part of Senior Leadership Team) as a guest in the meeting today.

III. Additions or Adjustments to the Agenda

A. Additions/Adjustments

None.

IV. Committee Reports

A. School Performance Committee

- Anna Klein-Christie attended in person to report a significant oversight after first year at Baxter and shared that the students didn't take the Through Year Assessment at Baxter last year.
- It has been addressed for this year and a discussion has happened with the state and it will be recorded as 0% participation.
- An action plan will be submitted and is straight forward (plans to take test in future set in stone and prioritized).
- Focus last year was on improving learning environment and chronic absenteeism going down. Showing improvement since last year with a lot of assets, recognizing there was challenges for credibility from the mistake.
- Tori stated it was a red flag to performance committee and that taking the test was not a choice. Math scores also dropped last year and no way to test or judge that the scores have gone up. Contract is in violation with commission and a formal letter will be sent out.
- Tori went over summarization of school committee and mentioned Lana's school performance report at the state board for 02/14, revisions on performance framework, and amendments Ecology Learning Center wants to make.
- Jim stated it was shocking to see Baxter not be able to take a required and important test.
- Tom said he recognizes test scores aren't all there is but it's all they have to analyze and compare and gave reminder to all charter schools to not skip the required tests.
- Norm and Jim thanked Anna for coming and showing accountability and ownership of the mistake and Tori stated she was happy Baxter self-reported to MDOE.

B. Finance Committee

- Leza Packard (head of school at Ecology Learning Center) reporting about hoping to accept a gift offered, a facility from Unity College.
- Music, theater, performing arts, art gallery - hoping to be re-opened on March 10, 2024 is commission votes to approve this facility they would be receiving. Foster real world learning through mentorship and craft facilitated by this building and what comes with it.
- Place where students can run the box office, find performers, and find personal ways to run community theater, teaching students about business-running. Inter-disciplinary learning focus.
- Two new grand pianos, twelve pottery wheels, two kilns also included with the facility.
- Leigh summarized finance committee - gift from Unity for ELC discussed during it. Lots of positive around great opportunity especially in a small or rural community.
- She shared Joe Drago helped discuss some of the finance aspects of the building and he worked with ELC to understand feasibility of this.
- School is in solid financial situation right now, operating budgets accounted over time/plan, increased enrollment, and fundraising plans.
- Fundraising gives commission a little bit of pause but plan is hopeful, optimistic about it based on pledges as well as knowing the enrollment is promising with long waitlist. (14 more students expected)
- Still some risk but as the finance committee, everyone is in support as opportunity doesn't happen like that often.
- Brian shared it provides for both students and community and a big factor into idea of supporting.
- Joe shared finance review of ELC - 106 students currently, three year plans show them breaking even after showing thousands of donations each year, no cash overhead in this model shared, strictly looking at new cash costs that need to be covered, with more programming the new building will run at a cash deficit, cash flow impact model shown with level of community programming planned, building expense on average \$60k a year, and capital repairs and improvements \$52k. Goal to figure out how to fill financial hole.
- Five performances already scheduled, three in March, some artists are willing to come for free or minimal pay and show making more income and not so dependent on ticket sales that way.
- \$50k in pledges since announced building, waiting to release fundraising campaign publicly if commission approves.
- FY25 budget is underway for commission, Amy had shared at meeting that by March a strong draft will be shared. Looking at employees of commission, at changing temp employment, etc. Amy shared dashboard in packet. No surprises. Financial order request was signed this week by Governor Mills; 30 day wait period until funds available.
- Transportation of charter schools being analyzed; compared to general public schools.

- Schools prepared for covid funding to stop per school, thinking about philanthropy, and how that is impacting budgets.
- Revision to finance portion of performance framework particularly within cash on hand, proposed revisions done.
- Audit season - some audits still coming in. There should be audits completed by end of March.

C. Executive Committee

- Norm summarized committee meeting. Budget being finalized, Tom researching employment and how that might be structured, and about more developments with 10th charter school process.

V. Public Comment*

A. Public Comment

None.

VI. Executive Director/Commission Staff Report

A. School Updates

- Lana attended Baxter for the 'Shark Tank' where students presented projects and there were cash prizes and faculty judges. Lana stated the projects were impressive.
- Scholastic Awards for Baxter last week won 20 awards accumulatively.
- Baxter is holding Winter Chess tournaments for Baxter students and locals.
- MeVA partnered with Cook Center for Human Connection and ParentGuidance.Org providing coaching services for students and families and a free mental health workshop monthly for MeVA students.
- MeAA events coming up (included date documentation in packet) and they went to Colby this past weekend.
- Kennebec Valley Music Festival had some MeAA kids perform a couple of weeks ago as well.

B. Organizational Updates

- Rachel Spell leaving the commission staff this week.
- Lana mentioned meeting with most of the schools in person for the Mid-Year meetings and the reports will be shared next month.
- State decided not to share growth data this year, may be difficult to track student growth using NWEA Growth alone due to challenges with NWEA platform. Not confident in making public but schools can still see the growth; errors made it seem like not reliable measure.

- Lana will be sharing with state board about performance framework tomorrow (2/14).
- ((James Ford left the meeting early at 2:15pm))
- Lana invited Count Me In executive to brief presentation next month for commission meeting to share work around improving chronic absenteeism.

C. Media Updates

- Articles included about Baxter, a winner of a women in science award and of students helping clean up in community.
- Article about chronic absenteeism and how Stanford is addressing problem that there is a way via a 'walking' bus system. Lana wishes to continue highlighting innovative practices in helping attendance.
- Tori mentioned benefit of walking bus system since they use it in Bangor and how parents do not have to be up to get students up in morning with this system. Jim mentioned that it was also done in Lewiston some years ago.

D. New Charter School

- Draft application launched publicly (on website!)
- Norm facilitated meetings with a lot of local colleges to discuss charter schools in Maine, expectations, and if they have interest in being involved in a charter school or if they know any places who would be.
- Rural areas - do not want to take away students from rural areas completely with introduction of new school. Geography big aspect of looking at 10th charter school.

VII. Monthly School Portfolio/Data Report

A. Enrollment Map

- Rachel Spell shared a demonstration of how the enrollment map works and explained the data used to create it and the link was shared with the commission.

VIII. Unfinished Business

A. Unfinished Business

- Fiddlehead Request for Funds.

IX. New Business Requiring Approval and/or Acceptance

A. To Consider the Approval of Ecology Learning Center's Request for New Facility

Leigh Albert made a motion to accept approval of Ecology Learning Center's Request for New Facility.

Tori Kornfield seconded the motion.
The board **VOTED** to approve the motion.

Roll Call

Jim Handy Aye
Tori Kornfield Aye
Tom Keller Aye
James Ford Absent
Brian Langley Aye
Norm Higgins Aye
Leigh Albert Aye

B. To Consider the Approval of Ecology Learning Center's Request to Increase Enrollment

Leigh Albert made a motion to approve Ecology Learning Center's request to increase enrollment.

Jim Handy seconded the motion.
The board **VOTED** to approve the motion.

Roll Call

Tom Keller Aye
Leigh Albert Aye
Brian Langley Aye
Jim Handy Aye
Tori Kornfield Aye
James Ford Absent
Norm Higgins Aye

C. To Consider the Approval of Revisions to the Performance Framework for SY2023-24

Jim Handy made a motion to approve revision to Performance Framework for SY2023-24.

Tori Kornfield seconded the motion.

- Changes would go into effect this year (adding through year proficiency target, post-secondary readiness, and growth. Subgroups if 10 or most students in any subgroup, want to see complete numbers for the data, and five/six year graduation rates.)
- Some targets moved to different sections (chronic absenteeism and panorama survey targets).
- Chronic Absenteeism metric possibly be added, discussed more, but not being included in revisions today.
- Science as inclusion in future with ELA and Math, not currently included due to also needing more discussion and would want schools to know this is going to be implemented well ahead of time.

- Possibly moving section 5; not proposed in revision but could be included in future.

The board **VOTED** to approve the motion.

Roll Call

Jim Handy	Aye
Leigh Albert	Aye
Brian Langley	Aye
Tori Kornfield	Aye
Norm Higgins	Aye
James Ford	Absent
Tom Keller	Aye

X. New Business Requiring Notification to the Commission (No formal action to be taken by Commission)

A. New Governing Board Members

- Jamie Dickson for Fiddlehead School.

B. Board Member Resignations

None.

C. Board Member Term Outs

None.

XI. Next Month's Topics

A. Next Month's Topics

- Fiddlehead's Fund Request.
- Mid-Year Meetings.

XII. Announcements

A. Important Dates

- March 10th opening of new building for ELC.

B. Next Regular Business Meeting

March 12, 2024 from 1pm-3pm *at Baxter Academy*

XIII. Closing Items

A.

Adjourn Meeting

There being no further business to be transacted, and upon motion duly made, seconded and approved, the meeting was adjourned at 2:58 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,
Norm Higgins

Documents used during the meeting

- FY24_MCSC_Budget_vs_Actual_Report_as_of_2.5.24.pdf
- Maine schools say path to fixing chronic absenteeism starts with building relationships.pdf
- Portland students collect trash after storm.pdf
- Celebrating Excellence - Society of Women Engineers honors outstanding Maine high school juniors and seniors.pdf
- Pearson's Connections Academy Partners with HOSA–Future Health Professionals to Engage and Connect Middle and High Schoolers Early to Healthcare Careers.pdf
- Brunswick non-profit is helping all Mainers gear up for outdoors.pdf
- ELC Facility Amendment.pdf
- ELC Enrollment Increase Application.pdf
- Performance Framework February 2024.docx.pdf
- FSAS New Governing Board Member (Jamie Dickson).pdf
- MeAA Public Events.docx

* The Charter School Commission does not allow airing of complaints in public meetings regarding Commission and charter school employees or school employment matters, in order to protect employee privacy, to comply with Maine law and pursuant to our contractual relation with the schools. To the extent that the Commission receives complaints and concerns relating to school employees in writing, those concerns will be reviewed and addressed by the Commission and its staff outside of a public meeting. This meeting is not the appropriate forum for such comments. You are free to direct your concerns in writing to the Commission's Executive Director, if you have not done so already.