

Maine Charter School Commission

September, 2015

On May 18, 2015, an announced on-site visit was made to Maine Connections Academy public charter school. The Maine Charter School Commission (MCSC) review team of 3 members was accompanied by the MCSC Executive Director, MCSC Director of Program Management, and Department of Education Special Education representative. The visiting team held interviews with school leadership, staff, students, parents, community partners, and the school's Governing Board. They also reviewed data provided by the school. Documents provided by the school are available from the MCSC office. Information gathered from documents, interviews, and on-site observation was used to determine the extent to which the school has met its contracted performance targets.

Commission Member, Review Team Chair	Ande Smith
Commission	Mike Wilhelm
Commission	Laurie Pendleton
MCSC Executive Director	Bob Kautz
MCSC Director of Program Management	Gina Post
DOE Special Education Representative	Peg Armstrong

The Maine State Charter School Commission will provide thoughtful stewardship in authorizing and monitoring public charter schools consistent with State statutes to create unique, high-quality learning options for Maine students.

Maine Charter School Commission

ANNUAL MONITORING REPORT September 2015

Section 1: School Overview

School Name	Maine Connections Academy (MCA)
Address	75 John Roberts Road South Portland, Maine 04106

Head of School	Karl Francis
Special Education Coordinator	Peter Taffel
Board Chair	Amy Volk

Year Opened	School year 2014-2015
Years in Operation	In its first year
Number of Sending Districts	88
Grades Served	7-12
Number of Students	297
Number of Students on Waiting List	200
Average Class Size	14
Teacher – Student Ratio	1:31

Mission	The mission of MCA (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.

Section 2: Indicator Summary Table

Indicator	Meets Contract agreement	Partially meets	Does not meet
Student Academic Proficiency		X ¹	
Student Academic Growth	X		
Achievement Gaps in proficiency and growth between major student subgroups	X		
Student Attendance		X ²	
Recurrent Enrollment from Year to Year	X		
Post-Secondary Readiness	X		
Financial Performance and Sustainability	X		
Governance Board Performance and Stewardship	X		
Adequacy of Facilities Maintenance in Support of Program	X		
Transportation	X		
School Social and Academic Climate	X		
Parent and Community Engagement	X		

¹ MCA partially met its targets in the area of Academics, falling short in the area of mathematics on Smarter Balanced State testing. See Section 3.

² MCA partially met its targets in the area of attendance. See section 4.

Section 3: Academics

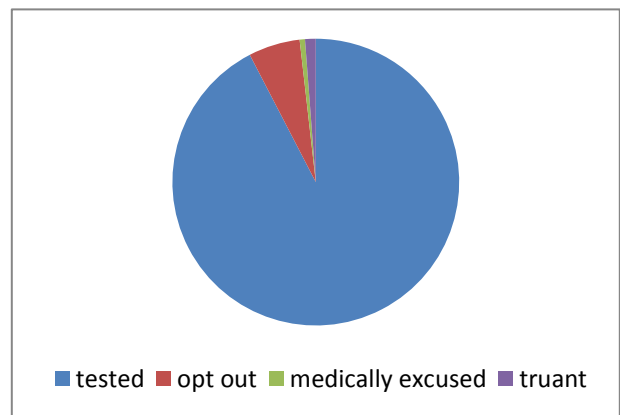
MCA partially met its targets in the area of Academics.

Targets:

- *Percentage of students at proficiency level will increase every year by at least 2% points over the prior year. *MCA is in its first year*
- *Year 1 students will achieve 85% of the state average showing met or above*
- *Student Academic Proficiency: School Developed Assessments – LEAP 75% score on the LEAP post-test or a 10% point gain from their pretest score will be 85% or higher, or will increase 5% points each year until it reaches 85%*
- *Target at 2% annual growth expected for continuously enrolled students*
- *Established benchmarks for each student – baselines to be determined in first year*
- *Achievement gaps in proficiency and growth between major subgroups using ESEA-based system – Baseline to be determined in first year*

Performance:

92.2% of MCA’s 7th, 8th, and 3rd year high school students completed their required Smarter Balance Math and English Language Arts State Assessments. During the 2014-15 Smarter Balanced testing MCA had 154 7th, 8th, and 3rd year high school students enrolled. Participation at grade 7 was 96%. Participation at grade 8 was 92.2%. Participation at grade 11 was 91.2%. Overall, there were 5 students who submitted a medical exemption (only 1 was approved after state review). There were 9 students who submitted opt-out notices and 2 students who were non-responsive and have been chronically truant and unreachable despite significant efforts to address and correct this.



The scores in grade 7 for both subject areas, and for ELA in grades 8 and 11 met the goal of Year 1 students achieving 85% of the state average showing met or above. In grade 8 the math score was 1% lower than what needed to be achieved to meet the goal. Grade 11 math cannot be reported due to maintaining privacy for the small number of students in that category. Goals in Science were met at both 8th grade and High school level.

ELA	% level 3 or above - MCA	% level 3 or above - Maine	Goal	Met?
Grade 7	56%	48%	41%	Yes
Grade 8	66%	48%	41%	Yes
High School	67%	47%	40%	Yes

Math	% level 3 or above - MCA	% level 3 or above - Maine	Goal	Met?
Grade 7	46%	36%	31%	Yes
Grade 8	27%	33%	28%	No
High School	Student sample too small to report	25%	21%	No

Science	% level 3 or above - MCA	% level 3 or above - Maine	Goal	Met?
Grade 8	82%	71%	60%	Yes
High School	36%	42%	36%	Yes

The “Longitudinal Evaluation of Academic Progress,” or LEAP, is Connections Education’s Pre-, Mid-, and Post-Assessment. Students in grades 7-8 take the LEAP Math and the LEAP English/Language Arts assessments. These assessments are given in the fall, winter, and again at the end of the school year. LEAP Growth Students were included below if they had both a pretest and posttest score in Connexus. Data below is current as of July 7, 2015. Growth is defined as having a score of at least 75% on the posttest or improving by at least 10 percentage points from pretest to posttest. Growth was also examined as a function of having a score of at least 75% on the posttest or improving by any amount from pretest to posttest. MCA LEAP Reading scores are much closer than LEAP Math scores to reaching the target of 75% score on the LEAP post-test or a 10% point gain from their pretest score will be 85% or higher, or will increase 5% points each year until it reaches 85%. Scores reported below reflect any gain, not necessarily a 10% gain.

LEAP Math :

Number of Students	Average Raw Score Pretest	Average Raw Score Posttest	Average Gain	% with LEAP Growth	Goal: % with a 75% or Higher on Posttest OR any Gain	Met?
78	44	58	14	57.7%	57.7%	no

LEAP Reading

Number of Students	Average Raw Score Pretest	Average Raw Score Posttest	Average Gain	% with LEAP Growth	Goal: % with a 75% or Higher on Posttest OR any Gain	Met?
76	62	69	8	67.1%	80.3%	no

Scantron Performance Series (Grades 9-10) Students were included below if they had both a pretest and posttest score in Connexus. Data below is current as of July 7, 2015. Growth is defined as having a score of at least 75% on the posttest or improving by at least 10 percentage points from pretest to posttest. Growth was also examined as a function of having a score of at least 75% on the posttest or improving by any amount from pretest to posttest.

Scantron Math

Number of Students	Average Score Pretest	Average Score Posttest	Average Gain	% with Scantron Growth	% with a 75% or Higher on Posttest OR any Gain
48	2861	2965	104	68.8%	81.63%

Scantron Reading

Number of Students	Average Score Pretest	Average Score Posttest	Average Gain	% with Scantron Growth	% with a 75% or Higher on Posttest OR any Gain
52	3241	3304	63	92.3%	96.2%

Subject Area Passing Grades

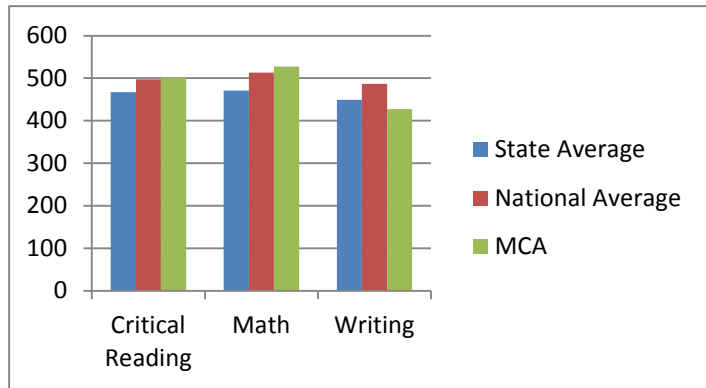
Passing Percent by Subject: Grades 7-8	First Semester	Second Semester	+/- from first semester to second semester
Language Arts	91%	88%	-3%
Math	83%	86%	+3%
Science	83%	83%	+0
Social Studies	91%	92%	+1%

Passing Percent by Subject: Grades 9-12	First Semester	Second Semester	+/- from first semester to second semester
Language Arts	83%	85%	+2%
Math	80%	79%	-1%
Science	87%	94%	+7%
Social Studies	86%	85%	-1%

9 MCA students took SAT in April and early May

State average in Critical Reading: 467
6 MCA students (66.7%) scored above this (average score for MCA students was 502)

State average in Math: 471
7 MCA students (77.8%) scored above this (average score for MCA students was 527)



State average in Writing: 449
3 MCA students (33.3%) scored above this (average score for MCA students was 427)

The scores on the Critical Reading and Math subject areas meet the target of the % of students scoring at or above state average on above tests greater than or equal to 50%. The Writing fell short by 16.7 %.

Section 4: Enrollment & Attendance

MCA met its targets in the area of Enrollment. In the area of Attendance, MCA partially met its targets. Truancy was one contributor to not meeting the target. It appears, however; that MCA made every effort to improve attendance. Additionally, MCA's attendance is calculated by dividing the student's total sum of hours logged by the sum of the total number of hours that make up one day of school. In MCA's case, 5 hours equals one day. This calculation and tracking process is unlike a traditional public school where a student can be in school for a small portion of the day and be considered in attendance for that day. While MCA tracks attendance differently, it is striving to meet the high standard of other non- virtual public schools.

Targets:

- Average Daily Attendance Rate of 93% for grades 7 and 8, and 90% for grades 9-12
- Individual Student Attendance Rate
- Unexcused Absences
- Retention rate of 70% of students during the school year
- 50% of students to be re-enrolled from one year to the next
- Continuous enrollment of students for multiple years

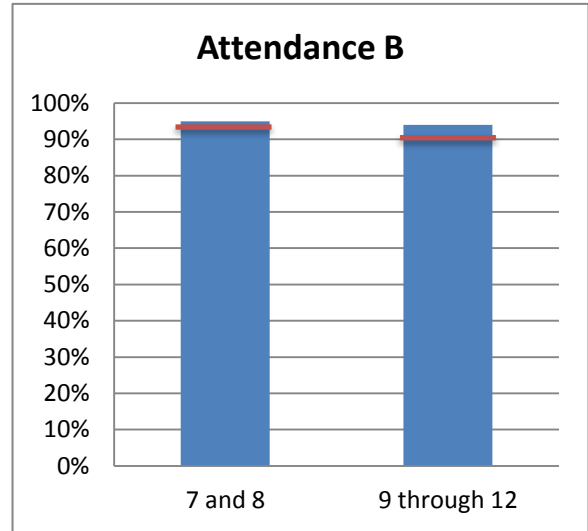
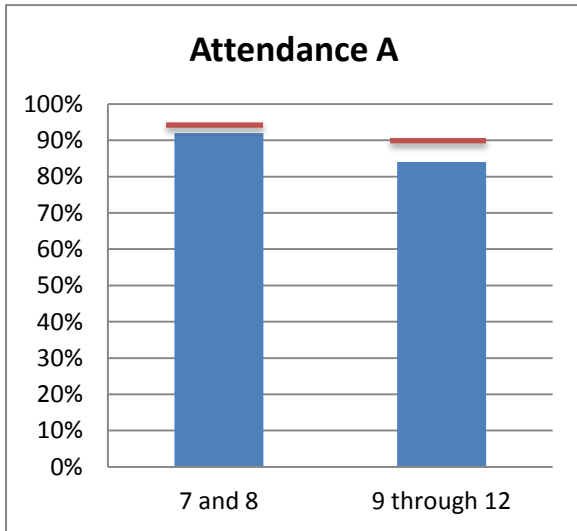
Performance:

The average daily attendance rate for students in grades 7 & 8 was 92%, falling shy of the Year 1 target of 93%. The average daily attendance rate for students in grades 9-12 was 84%, falling shy of the Year 1 target of 90%. (See graph A)

The average daily attendance rate for students in grades 7 & 8 after removing Chronically Truant/Unexcused students from the data was 95%, meeting the Year 1 target of 93%.

The average daily attendance rate for students in grades 9-12 after removing Chronically Truant/Unexcused students from the data was 94%, meeting the Year 1 target of 90%. (See graph B)

Truant is defined as absent 7 days in a row or 10 days cumulative with more than 1 incident recorded in the state Truancy system. The only students removed from the data in graph B were those with 45 or more days (representing 25% of the 180 school year) without activity which is calculated by (Days enrolled-Days Attended) – (Number of Excused Absences + Vacation Days).



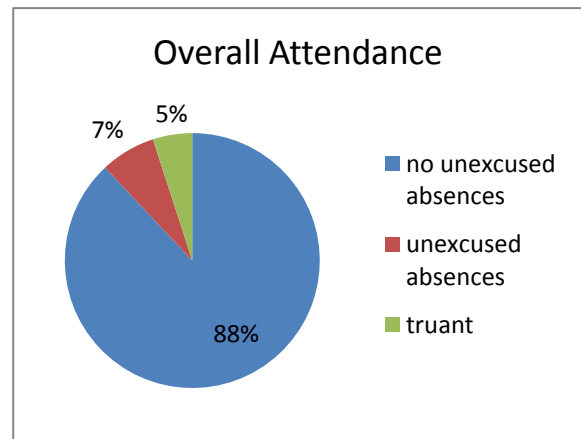
Overall Average Daily Attendance Rate 92%

12 (5%) habitual truant

19 (7%) unexcused absences

226 (88%) no unexcused absences

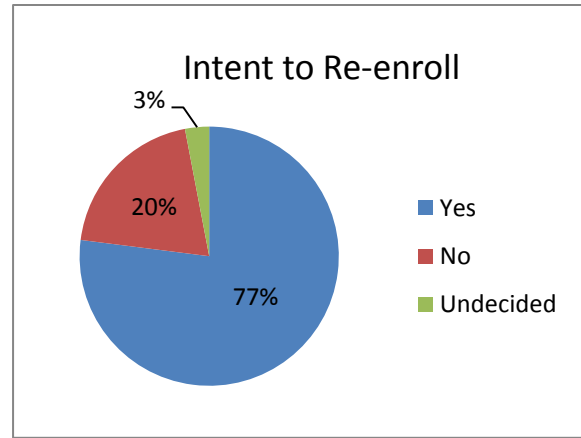
At the End-of-year visit with the Maine Charter School Commission, MCA’s Head of School expressed concern regarding truant students. He has made many efforts to contact students and their families, including having local law enforcement making visits to homes of truant students in regions of Maine that are not close.



During the school year the retention rate was 77%, exceeding the 70% target.

Recurrent Enrollment Data as of 7/15/2015

Students Eligible to Return = 258
Yes Intent to Return = 199
No Intent to Return = 52
Undecided = 7
This is a 77% Intent to Return Rate, exceeding the target of 50%



MCA administration reported that many non-returning students cited that MCA was not a good match for them. MCA is working to give prospective students a clear picture of what their program looks like.

MCA met its Post-Secondary Readiness targets.

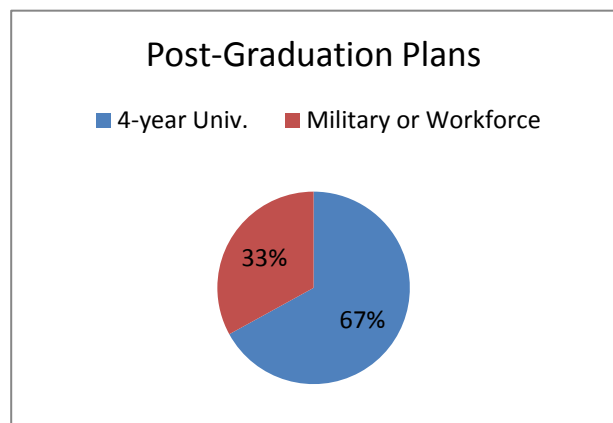
Targets:

- Senior graduation rate of 70% increasing 5 points in every year getting to 90% in year 5
- Explore possibility of dual enrollment courses
- ACT, SAT, Accuplacer, and other tests to be determined
- 30% of graduates enrolled in a post-secondary institution, college, trade, and apprenticeship by February of year 1 after graduation.
- 10% of graduates not enrolled in post-secondary institutions but employed full time or enlisted in the military by February of year 1 after graduation.

Six out of seven MCA seniors graduated in June 2015. This 85.7% graduation rate meets the target of 70%. The seventh senior was credit-deficient and had been chronically truant since the time of his enrollment in January 2015. MCA worked to support and address this student’s truancy issues via certified letters, phone calls, truancy meetings, support plans, face-to-face welfare checks, etc.

66.7% of MCA’s 2015 graduates have accepted offers of enrollment to 4-year universities, meeting the target of 30%. 33.3% of 2015 graduates plan on enlisting in the military or pursuing full-time employment after graduation.

During the 2014-15 school year MCA established a partnership with Rural U – University of Maine Fort Kent for 9 dual enrollment courses taught by MCA teachers to begin for the 2015-2016 school year.



Section 5: Governance

MCA met its targets in the area of Governance

Targets

- *Monthly Governance Board Meetings*
- *Bylaws and policies in application regularly reviewed*

Chair of the Board	Amy Volk
Board Member	Julie Hannon
Board Member	Carol Weston
Board Member	Amy Linscott
Board Member	Nick McGee

During its first year in operation, the MCA Governing Board worked to accomplish many tasks. At the 2014-15 End-of-year meeting with the Maine Charter Commission the MCA Governing Board identified having hired the Head of School as one of its greatest accomplishments. It feels he has strengths in all areas, and is a great fit for the school. It expects he will continue to grow with the school. Another accomplishment was the hiring of RHR Smith for finances. The Board identified finances as their area of weakness and the Representative of RHR Smith has the expertise they need.

At the End-of-year meeting the MCA Governing Board also described the working relationship between Head of School, Representative of RHR Smith, and the Board themselves as “excellent.”

The Board is pleased with the group of teachers employed by MCA. They report that it began to feel like a school around December. They are happy with the interactions that are happening between the teachers and the students. At the time of the End-of-year visit with the Maine Charter School Commission they believed there would be a 100% teacher retention rate going into year 2.

The Board has a procedure in place for evaluating the Head of School and used this procedure during the 2014-15 school year. The procedure being used is the one provided by Connections Education. Some of this procedure is being edited and adjusted to suit the specific needs of MCA for use next year.

Another change the Governing Board is making for next year will be faculty salaries. The Board said that salaries are being increased. The additional bonus will remain intact. They are exploring benefits and health insurance options as well.

The MCA Governing Board is hoping to add 2 or 3 new Board members, and hope to find members with backgrounds in education, finances, and a parent.

Challenges and areas of concern identified by the Board include establishing reserve funds, year 2 enrollment, and, as a Governing Board, focusing more on oversight, rather than implementation. They are hoping that the Head of School can take on some of the finances and some of the Connections Education pieces in the coming year. The Governing Board has heard him express his need to spend more time with teachers and students. They hope to be able to support him with this. In the coming school year teachers will be able to perform some administrative tasks and allow the Head of School more time to interact with students and teachers.

The Governing Board meets the first Friday of the month through their Annual Meeting 2015, meeting their target of monthly meetings. The agenda for regular meetings are posted on the website and at the location of the meeting. Approved meeting minutes are posted to the school Board’s website shortly after the Board has

approved them (<http://www.connectionsacademy.com/maine-virtual-school/school-board/school-board-info.aspx>). Governance and policies are reviewed on an ongoing basis and revisions to current policies and procedures or implementation of new policies and procedures are considered as needed.

Section 6: Administration

Head of School	Karl Francis
Special Education Coordinator	Peter Taffel
CFO	Heather Neal

The Head of School reports feeling really good about how far MCA has come and the impact it has had on students and families. He is pleased with the quality of work by the staff.

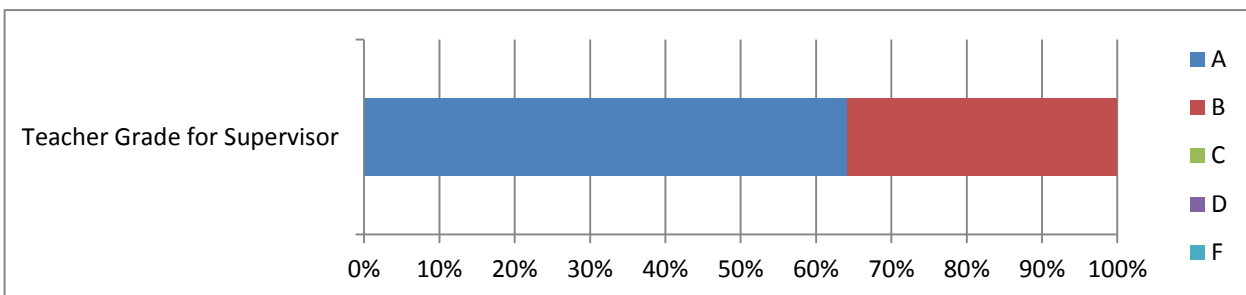
He communicates with the Governing Board regularly via phone and email, as well as the monthly Governing Board Meeting. He reports that at the beginning of year contact with the Board were more frequent, and that Board Members were in school frequently and asked a lot of questions. MCA’s Head of School reports that the Board is learning the process of how to effectively manage the school.

MCA’s Head of School meets with each teacher individually once every 2 weeks. They meet to look at data, assignments to be corrected, goals, identifying academic needs, and more. Teachers receive feedback and they discuss what both he and the teacher can do differently.

The Formal evaluation process is in the form of questions that come digitally. The teachers digitally rate themselves, and then write a descriptive portion. The Head of School also rates the teacher and writes a narrative. Then they meet again to discuss the evaluations. He would like to do more lesson and communication observations in the coming school year, in addition to reviewing data.

HRH Smith Representative, and MCA’s CFO, agrees that there was more contact with the Governing Board at the beginning of year. She reports being in touch with the Governing Board Treasurer on a weekly basis. She has found his input to be critical. She finds that he has clear objectives for MCA to be financially sound.

100% of Maine Connection’s Academy Teachers rate their supervisor either an A or B.



Section 7: School Climate

MCA met its School Climate targets.

Targets:

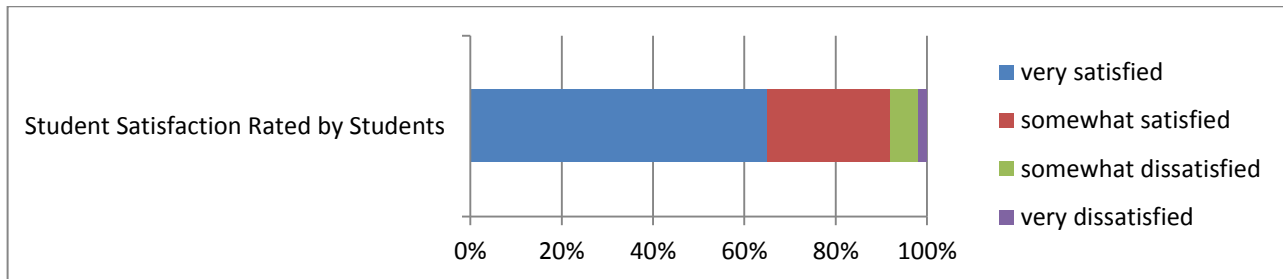
- *Instances of bullying, harassment or other abusive behavior*
- *80% of parents, staff, and students will express satisfaction on a confidential survey regarding social and academic climate*
- *Emotional and social growth of students*

Performance:

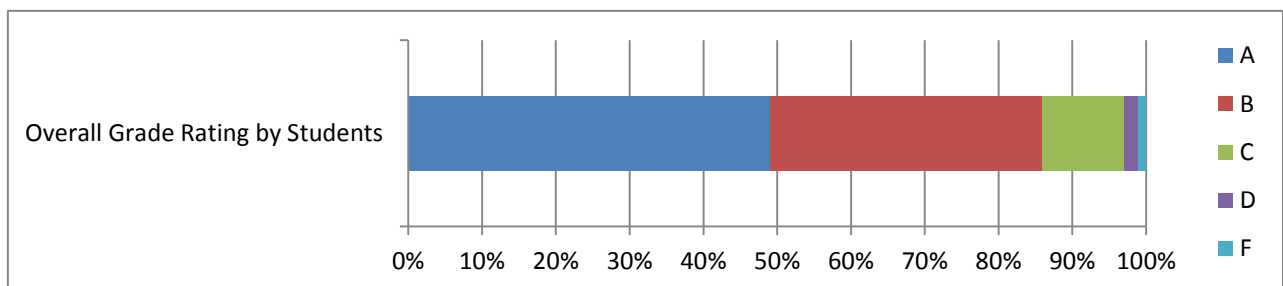
During the 2014-15 school year MCA did not receive any formal complaints of bullying, harassment, or other abusive behavior.

During the Maine Charter School Commission's End-of-year Visit, students who were interviewed reported being pleased with the flexibility MCA provided. One student was free to pursue sporting opportunities during the day and complete school work around her availability. Another student was attending MCA after having been bullied at her previous school, and was appreciating feeling safe and comfortable while completing her education.

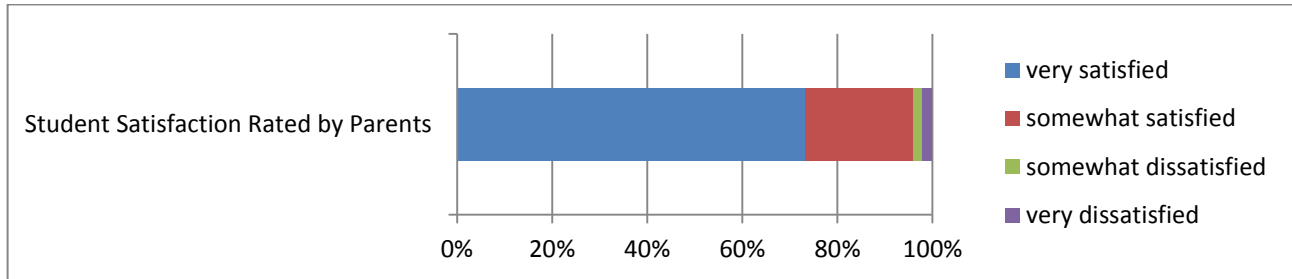
92% of MCA students reported being satisfied with MCA.



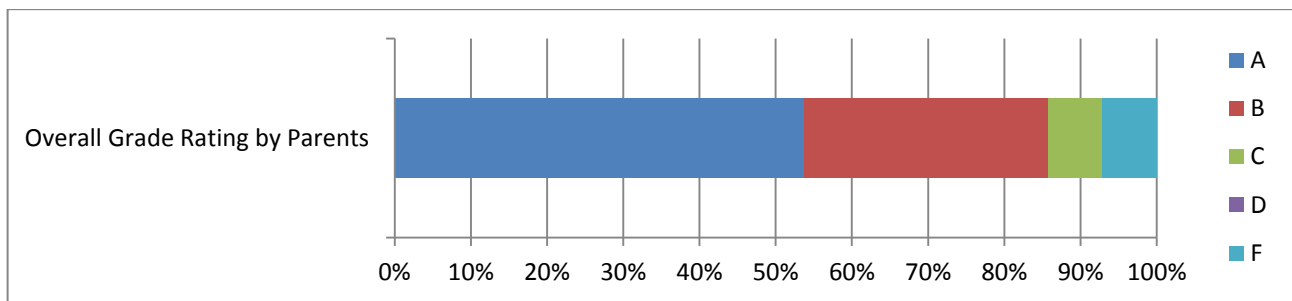
86% of students gave MCA an overall grade of either an A or a B on the Student Satisfaction Survey.



Over 95% of parents reported their child being satisfied with the Connections Academy Program.

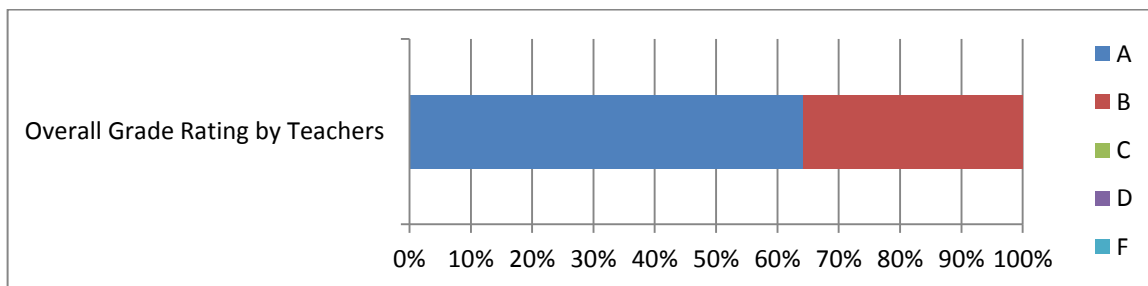


91.8% of parents gave MCA an overall grade of either an A or a B on the Parent Satisfaction Survey.

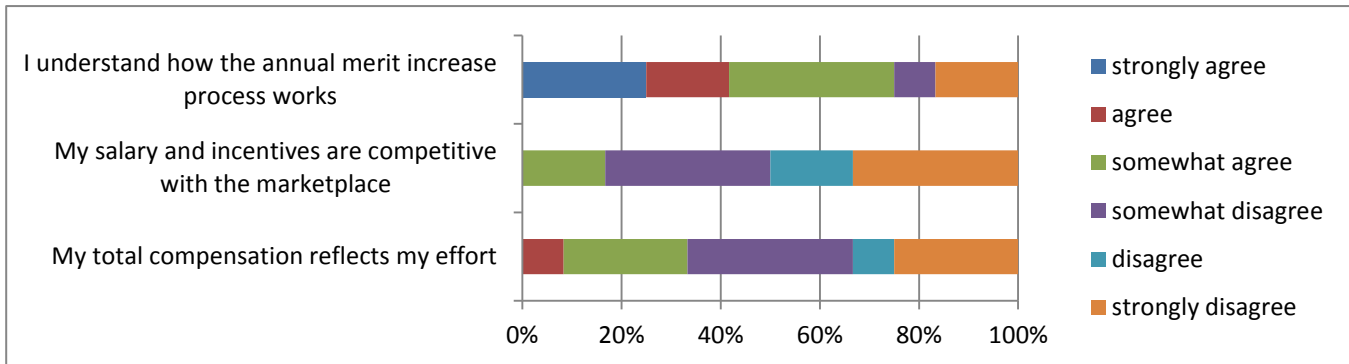


MCA School Counseling and Special Education department have focused energy in the area of emotional and social growth in ways such as the School Counseling department offering Weekly Live Lessons for 7-12 grade students focusing on topics such as social skill development, coping with anxiety, peer relationships, and career and college readiness. Individual support is also provided and referrals to outside providers are made when appropriate. The Special Education department offers behavioral and social support primarily on an individual basis. School wide activities are also in place.

100% of teachers gave MCA an overall grade of either A or B.



While MCA teachers report being overall satisfied with MCA and their supervisor, they feel that the compensation and benefits need to be improved, as well as the explanation of how the annual merit increase process works.



Overall, when ratings given by parents, students, and teachers are combined 93% rate MCA either and A or B.

Section 8: Parent and Community Engagement

MCA met its targets in the area of Parent and Community Engagement.

Targets:

- *A plan for Parent Conferences established*
- *Capture data to show percent of logged contact between learning coaches and teachers*
- *Establish 3 Partnerships in year 1*

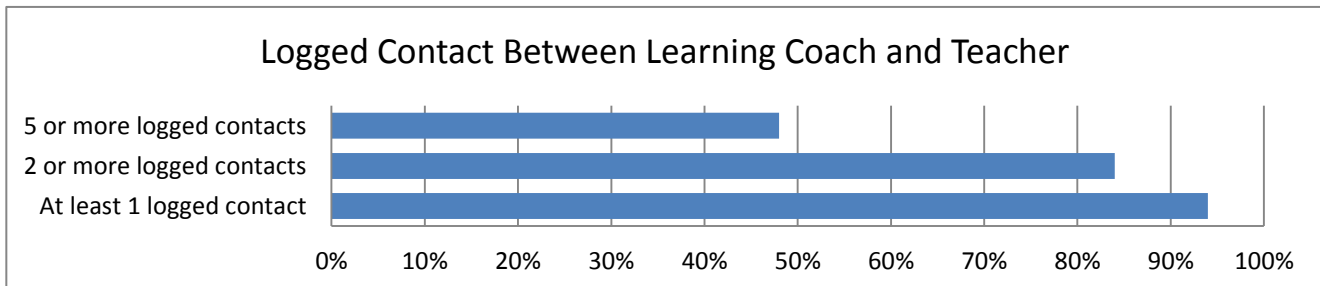
Performance:

After the initial PLP conference at the beginning of the year, teachers have at minimum bi-weekly phone calls scheduled with families. Additional conferences are scheduled as needed. There are also conferences at the end of the year for course placement purposes. Records are maintained through the Student Log system.

94% of students have at least 1 logged contact between the Learning Coach and teacher.

84% of students have at least 2 logged contacts between the Learning Coach and teacher.

48% of students have 5 or more logged contacts between the Learning Coach and teacher.



Educational partnerships include:

- University of Maine Fort Kent (for dual enrollment)
- University of Maine system (for state assessment administration)
- Maine Principal's Association
- Portland Regional Chamber of Commerce

The educational partnerships meet the target of establishing 3 partnerships in year 1.

Section 9: Finances

MCA met its Finances targets.

Targets:

- *Monthly Financial Reports*
- *Target of plus or minus 10% variation between budget and actual revenue and expenditures*

Performance:

The Governing board is updated on a monthly basis with a complete set of financial reports including balance sheet, actual to budget updates, bank reconciliations, and A/R aging reports to name a few. The Board Treasurer worked with the Principal and CFO on a nearly weekly basis during the first year to make sure the school was operating under sound financial decisions. The governing board votes monthly to authorize payment of expenses, thus offering another layer of protection and oversight.

MCA is currently forecasting a fund balance of \$-433.26. This equates to \$30,592.21 over budget largely as a result of non-budgeted start-up costs of \$85,927. MCA is working diligently to identify areas for cost savings and to create a more accurate FY2016 budget. The current deficit is within the 10% variation target.

The Board is adamant about not "going into the red" and, if needed, will cut services that will not impact the school environment. They are aware of the need to establish reserve funds and hope to do more fundraising in the upcoming year.

Section 10: Facilities & Maintenance and Transportation

MCA met its goals in the areas of Facilities & Maintenance and Transportation

Targets:

- *Adequacy of Facilities Maintenance in Support of the Program*
- *Adequacy of Transportation in Support of the Program*

Performance:

The MCA office is cleaned on a weekly basis, and periodic maintenance is performed as needed.

During the 2014-15 school year MCA did not have to provide any transportation for students. Transportation fees were incurred transporting teachers to facilitation of state wide assessments and student activities.

Section 11: Evidence of Mission and Vision Implementation

Mission

The mission of MCA (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. By providing success for students who may otherwise have been unsuccessful in their educational goals, MCA increases the number of students who have a strong academic foundation and a love of learning.

Based on the evidence in this report MCA's Mission and Vision is evident in the delivery of individual instruction via email, phone, and video. Students are able to complete school work around their schedule. Student enrollment, attendance, and climate all speak to the school's Mission and Vision.

Section 12: Commendations and Recommendations

Commendations

- MCA has worked effectively with the Program Provider to creatively address program and financial management.
- MCA's Governing Board continues to mature and appears to provide the right degree of focus and oversight.
- MCA's Head of School seems highly engaged and the board has done well in his hiring.
- Students, families, and teachers generally appear satisfied with the educational program.
- Early indications seem to indicate positive academic results.
- Marketing seems effective and professional.

Recommendations

- The teacher survey and in-person interviews indicate a level of dissatisfaction with MCA's overall compensation package. MCA might consider evaluating the current compensation package.
- The Administration needs more support to address issues such as truancy and attendance.
- MCA may consider evaluating the Performance Indicators for attendance so that they align with tracking method used by the school.
- Consider creating a plan to investigate SAT writing scores.
- As stated in the Monitoring Plan, the school shall develop an improvement plan to address academic weaknesses, particularly in the area of mathematics, by further analyzing state and local assessment data, and other means of assessment that have been used by the school.