

# Maine Charter School Commission

September, 2015

On June 11, 2015, an announced on-site visit was made to Baxter Academy for Technology and Science 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, 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	Jana Lapoint
Commission	John Bird
Commission	Ande Smith
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	Baxter Academy for Technology and Science
Address	54 York Street Portland, Maine

Executive Director	Carl Stasio
Board Chair	Kelli Pryor

Head of School	Michele LaForge
Special Education Coordinator	Mo Nunez

Year Opened	School year 2013-2014
Years in Operation	2
Number of Sending Districts	34
Grades Served	9-11
Number of Students	226
Number of Students on Waiting List	40
Average Class Size	16
Teacher – Student Ratio	1:16

Mission	To be a rigorous, college preparatory high school promoting student ownership of learning through curriculum focused specifically on science, technology, engineering, and math.
Vision	To use a technology-rich, project-based learning approach to education at the secondary level.

**Section 2: Indicator Summary Table**

Indicator	Meets Contract agreement	Partially meets Contract agreement	Does not meet Contract agreement
Student Academic Proficiency	X		
Student Academic Growth	X		
Achievement Gaps in proficiency and growth between major student subgroups <sup>1</sup>			
Student Attendance	X		
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		
Food Service	X		
Transportation	X		
School Social and Academic Climate	X		
Parent and Community Engagement	X		

<sup>1</sup> Achievement gaps- setting baseline

### Section 3: Academics

Baxter Academy for Technology and Science met its academic goals.

#### Targets:

- Proficiency on State Assessments in Reading and Math
- Proficiency on School-selected standardized tests in Reading and Math
- Growth on State Assessment for Reading and Math
- Decrease in reported gaps in proficiency between major student subgroups on Maine Assessment in Reading and Math
- Student Proficiency on SAT

#### Performance:

##### Smarter Balanced Completion Rates

Third year students at Baxter, a class of 54, completed the Smarter Balanced Assessment in April and May. The Head of School, reported that many of Baxter's students and parents are opposed to standardized testing, and that 4 students opted out of some or all testing, one student was absent for the majority of testing, and 2 other students were absent and participated in some, but not all testing. Baxter's Smarter Balanced test scores are 23% higher than the state average in ELA and 17% higher than the state average in Math.

ELA	% level 3 or above - Baxter	% level 3 or above - Maine
Grade 11	70%	47%

Math	% level 3 or above - Baxter	% level 3 or above - Maine
Grade 11	42%	25%

Math	% level 3 or above - Baxter	% level 3 or above - Maine
Grade 11	74%	42%

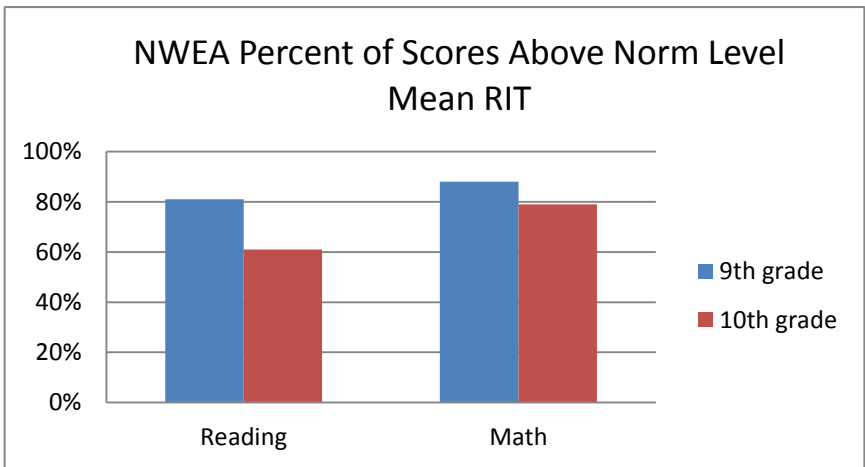
In the 2014-2015 school year, Baxter Academy tested students using the College Board PSAT and ReadStep tests, as well as the NWEA test. Baxter students have performed well on all standardized testing with a high percentage performing at or above grade level on the NWEA. Baxter's average PSAT and ReadStep scores are at or above all state and national means.

READISTEP	Baxter Mean	State Mean	National Mean
Critical Reading	4.7	4.2	3.9
Writing	4.4	3.9	3.7
Math	4.5	4.1	3.9

PSAT - Juniors	Baxter Mean	State Mean	National Mean
Critical Reading	51.0	45.4	46.2
Writing	46.7	43.7	44.7
Math	48.7	47.1	47.9

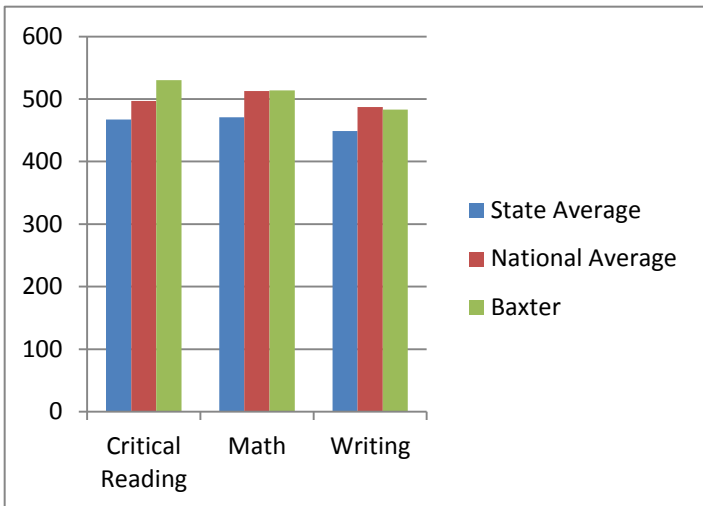
PSAT - Sophomores	Baxter Mean	State Mean	National Mean
Critical Reading	47.6	42.1	41.6
Writing	44.4	39.8	39.6
Math	43.2	43.2	41.6

On NWEA testing 81% of students in grade 9 scored at or above Norm Grade Level Mean RIT in Math, and 61% of students in grade 10 scored at or above Norm Grade Level Mean RIT in Math. 88% of grade 9 scored at or above Norm Grade Level Mean RIT in Math, and 79% of students in grade 10 scored at or above Norm Grade Level Mean RIT in Math. Of 172 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade students, 14 students (8%) opted out of testing.



46 Baxter students took the SATs and scored in the 57th percentile overall in Reading nationally, and at the 65th percentile overall in reading when compared with other Maine students. For Math, Baxter's students are in the 48th percentile nationally and in the 58th percentile for Maine students. In Writing, Baxter's students are in the 48th percentile nationally and the 57th percentile for the state of Maine.

Class of 2016 Average SAT Scores: Reading 530, Math 514, Writing 483



(State and National Average Data based on data from December 2014)

## Section 4: Enrollment and Attendance

Baxter Academy for Technology and Science met its targets in the area of Enrollment and Attendance.

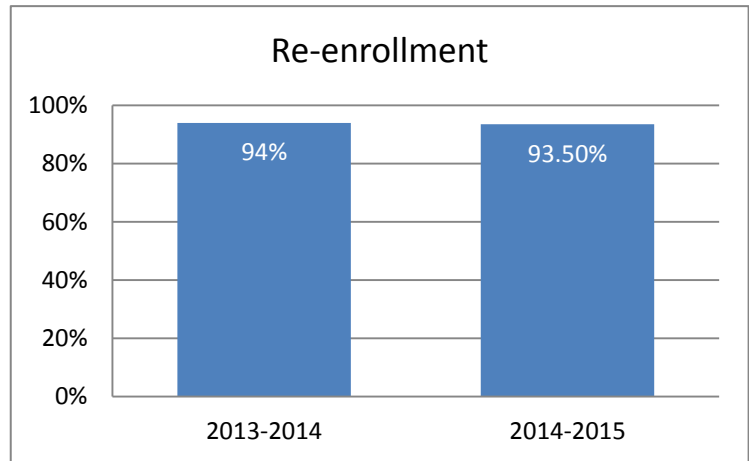
### Student Enrollment

#### Targets:

- 90% of students enrolled on “student count day” will still be enrolled on the last day of school.
- 90% of students enrolled on the last day school indicate intent to return the following school year.
- Student enrolled continuously for multiple years

#### Performance:

94% of students enrolled at the end of school year 2013-2014 returned for the 2014-2015 school year. During the 2014-15 school year, 15 of the 232 students enrolled withdrew; the retention rate for the year was 93.5%, meeting the 90% target. 98.6% of students enrolled at the end of the 2014-15 school year have re-enrolled for the 2015-16 school year, meeting the 90% re-enrollment target.



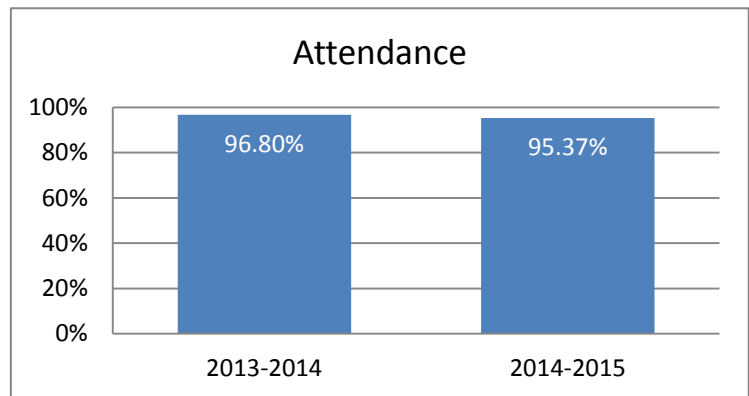
### Student Attendance

#### Targets:

- Average Daily Attendance
- Reduce Unexcused Absences
- Dual Enrollment Rate

#### Performance:

Percent in attendance for 2014-15 school year was 95.37%, a 1.4% decrease from the 2013-14 school year's attendance of 96.8%.



24% of Baxter juniors took at least 1 college course with a passing rate of 100%. Seven students took 1 dual enrollment course, 4 students took 2 courses, one student took 3 courses, and 1 student took 4 dual enrollment courses.

Because a recent survey revealed that more than 90% of Baxter's class of 2016 students were interested in exploring dual enrollment college courses, the Director of Guidance, will assist students in enrollment and will work on the development of a cohort of juniors and seniors for dual enrollment classes beginning fall 2015.

2014-2015 Governing Board

Chair of the Board	Kelli Pryor
Board Member	Allison Crean Davis
Board Member	Peter Montano
Board Member	Peter Morrison
Board Member	Ruth Dean
Board Member	Kim Gustafson
Board Member	Christian Sparling

**Section 5: Governance**

Baxter Academy for Technology and Science met its targets in the area of Governance.

**Governance Board Performance & Stewardship**

**Targets:**

- Transparent Board operations
- Responsible Board operations
- Legally compliant Board operations
- Provide oversight to school leadership team

**Performance:**

During the 2014-15 school year the Baxter Academy for Technology and Science Governing Board consisted of all 5 founding members and 2 additional new board members. The board is interested in expanding members with strong backgrounds in development and ties to STEM industries.

The Board meets on the second Tuesday of each month. Meeting agendas and minutes are posted to the school’s website. During the year, 2 board members attended a board training provided by Maine Association for Charter Schools.

Due to personnel changes, the Board Chair, has stepped in to pick up more development responsibilities with grant writing, marketing, by providing opportunities for community leaders to visit Baxter on Flex Friday’s and giving assistance with transportation issues. Other board members reported that they had been able this year to reduce their volunteer time in administrative matters and focus more on board governance.

The Governing Board reported that its greatest accomplishment during the 2014-15 school year was in development and outreach. Much of the school’s outreach remains in the hands of the board as it seeks to find wider support and partnerships that will sustain the school into the future. The board coordinated goodwill tours that introduced the school, and particularly the Flex Friday program, to such community leaders as the Commissioner of Education, legislators, economists, workforce development officers, university deans, local independent and public school educators, and STEM professionals. The board hosted an event to showcase Flex Friday to community leaders. The school maintained a membership in the local Chamber of Commerce and the board and administrators attended functions that relate to the school’s mission. Going forward, the board is shifting more of its focus from the start up to long-term strategic planning.

Next year, the need for additional space requires Baxter Academy for Technology and Science Governing Board to continue to work to insure that the current location, as well as a satellite space, will meet all applicable health, safety and fire code requirements and shall be sufficient in size to safely house the anticipated enrollment, and meet ADA/ state requirements.

## Section 6: Administration

Executive Director	Carl Stasio
Principal	Michele LaForge
Special Education Coordinator	Mo Nunez

Early in the 2014-15 school year there were some unexpected personnel changes at Baxter Academy, which required an adjustment of responsibilities and staffing. The resulting organization was closer to the original model and the Principal's job description more strongly reflected what was on the Baxter Academy charter application. The Executive Director also has a job description and responsibilities. Due to the personnel changes the Board Chair picked up development responsibilities, with the Executive Director as well as working with the Executive Director to resolve transportation issues.

In the works are plans to make Baxter Academy for Technology and Science more financially sustainable. After having completed major structural work over the past 2 summers, Baxter Academy is now looking to use the building in the summer and after school to raise more money by offering courses for current students and others.

The Principal has delegated many administrative tasks to the teachers at Baxter Academy. She reports that while this proved effective, it became difficult when there weren't opportunities for new teachers to step up and participate. Moving forward, there are plans for integrating new people, with current teachers planning a mentor program.

The Principal plans to use the Kim Marshall model for teacher evaluation, and is moving forward with implementation.

## Section 7: School Climate

Baxter Academy for Technology and Science met its targets in the area of School Climate.

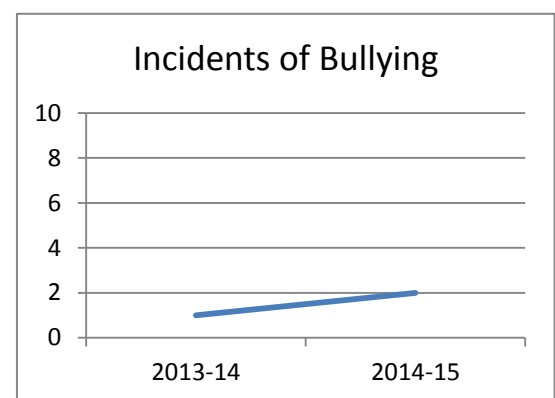
### School Social and Academic Climate

#### Targets:

- Safe School Climate
- Family and Student Satisfaction

#### Performance:

During the 2014-15 school year there were 2 reported incidents of bullying/harassment at Baxter Academy. These incidents were dealt with through the Restorative Justice process. Follow-up included parent conferences, letters of apology, weekly meetings with Head of School, and suspension.

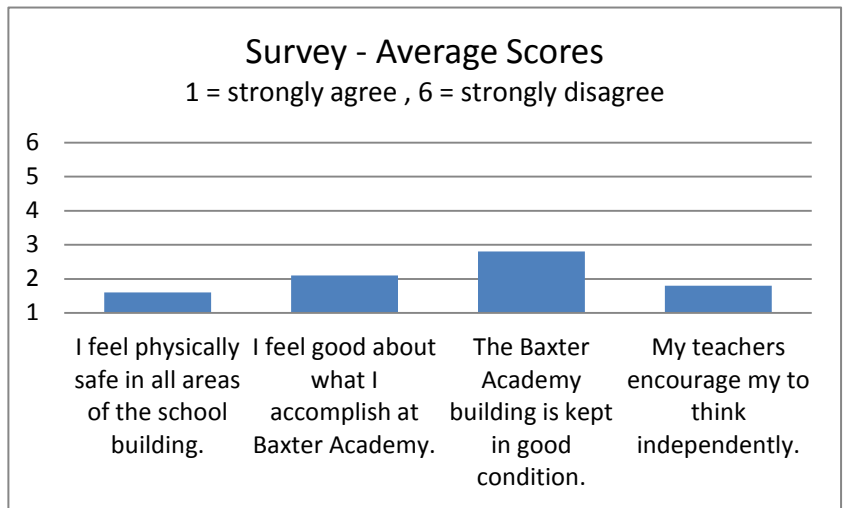




This spring, Baxter Academy for Technology and Science teachers, students, and parents were given a satisfaction survey. 15 teachers responded (100%), 73 students responded (32%), and 80 parents responded (approximately one response for every 2.8 students).

On a scale from 1 through 6, 1 being “strongly agree,” and 6 being “strongly disagree,” all 3 groups agreed with the following statements:

- I feel physically safe in all areas of the school building.
- I feel good about what I accomplish at Baxter Academy.
- The Baxter Academy building is kept in good condition.
- My teachers encourage me to think independently.



At the end-of-year visit with the Maine Charter School Commission, Baxter Academy teachers reported that they share duties and work together, that students feel comfortable being who they are, that students receiving Special Education Services thrive, and that problem-solving together produces positive outcomes. Teachers would like more resources, time and money, to accomplish their goals.

Parents who participated in the end-of-year visit interview described Baxter as still being in start-up mode, but feel it is working for their children. Parents appreciate the commitment of Baxter’s faculty, and being able to get answers to their questions.

The students that participated in the end-of-year visit interview with the Maine Charter School Commission reported being pleased with Baxter Academy’s technology and art opportunities, particularly noting the vast array of electives offered. They appreciate the scheduling flexibility, Flex Fridays and Snow-Day projects, and being able to go out into the community. Students reported bullying rarely happens and, when it does, is addressed immediately. Students expressed concern about anticipated crowding next year with the larger student population, as well as concern regarding teachers’ inconsistency in grading from class to class. Students miss playing sports, but feel that Baxter Academy is making an effort to satisfy needs regarding activities and athletics.

To nurture the emotional and social growth of its students, Baxter has divided students into advisories with a teacher and cohort of students who remain their “home base” for their entire high school careers. Advisors have 16 students in the cohort and meet 3 times each week for 30 minutes, and every morning for 10 minutes. Advisors are alert to student needs and are responsive to them.

## **Section 8: Parent and Community Engagement**

Baxter Academy for Technology and Science met its targets in the area of Parent and Community Engagement.

### **Parent and Community Engagement**

#### **Targets:**

- Parent Engagement
- Community Engagement

#### **Performance:**

This year, email communications from the Principal continued on average, once a week. In addition, a texting sign-up service was utilized for information blasts around snow days, communication delays, and transportation. In addition, the website calendar was kept up to date and dates for Parent Advisory meetings were made a year in advance. Feedback from parents indicates that email communications are sufficient to provide information and are perceived as having more direct communication with the Principal than they would have otherwise at their child's previous school.

In addition to the Student Led Conferences, with a participation rate of 92.2%, participation in the Parent Advisory meetings was strong, with 20-46 attendees every month.

During the 2014-15 school year Baxter Academy for Technology and Science hosted a STEM College Fair. Seven colleges participated in the event. Six participating schools were from Maine and one was from out of state.

Baxter Academy partnered with community organizations in various capacities during the 2014-15 school year. Partnerships included internships, project partnerships, and other educational experiences. Some of the community partners are: Wells Reserve, Biodiversity Research Institute, the Gulf of Maine Research Institute, ReVision Energy, University of New England, Salt Institute, The Bob Crewe Foundation, and many more.

## **Section 9: Finances**

Baxter Academy for Technology and Science met its targets in the area of Finances.

### **Financial Performance and Sustainability**

#### **Targets:**

- Governing Board reviews budget and makes adjustments to ensure financial health
- School has external audit conducted

#### **Performance:**

An external audit was completed in August 2014. Baxter's line of credit is at zero as of May 2015.

According to Baxter Academy's Board Treasurer, the school raised \$183,276, which was 90 percent of the \$205,000 budgeted. As economies of scale kick in with increased enrollment numbers, the Board has reduced donation expectations in the budget for the 2015-16 school year. This budget, based on an enrollment of 320 students, has been offset with revenue from adding the final class of students. This 2015-16 budget anticipates a net income projection of \$24,713 for the end of FY16.

## **Section 10: Facilities & Maintenance, Food Service, and Transportation**

Baxter Academy for Technology and Science met its targets in the area of Facilities, Food Service and Transportation.

### **Adequacy of Facilities Maintenance in Support of Program**

#### **Targets:**

- School facilities meet educational and health and safety standards

#### **Performance:**

Baxter Academy is currently utilizing 75% of its classroom spaces during any given period. Empty classrooms could hold another 72-80 students, depending on the class. Other options being explored to address space concerns include utilizing two oversized rooms that could easily and affordably be divided into two classrooms; for additional classroom space, and investigating additional nearby off-site space. They anticipate thirty to forty juniors and seniors will be off-site taking courses at USM; and that this will help to alleviate any space constraints.

There have been occasional maintenance issues with plumbing and the lift at Baxter Academy, which have been addressed in a timely fashion through the building owner and outside personnel.

Baxter Academy for Technology and Science currently outsources the cleaning of its building to Get Me Clean. In the upcoming 2015-2016 school year, Baxter Academy plans to hire a custodian who will be responsible for the cleaning and maintenance of the school building. This new in-house position would continue to provide a clean and safe environment with daily cleaning, as well as help to improve the organization and appearance within each room.

### **Food Service & Transportation**

#### **Targets:**

- Record of costs and student utilization

#### **Performance:**

##### **Food Service**

The Baxter Academy Lunch Program, with five local restaurants, offers a wide variety of healthy and fresh lunch options, including 15 menu options daily. During the 2014-2015 school year over 4,200 fresh lunches were provided to Baxter students. Approximately 39% of Baxter students participate in the lunch program. Those students who do not use the program bring their own lunch or find other local options.

During the 2014-15 school year, Baxter Academy provided over 3,100 lunches free to students eligible for free and reduced lunch. This represents approximately 74% of the total lunches provided during the 2014-15 school year and has a related cost of over \$15,500. Of the entire student population, 16% of students qualify for free or reduced lunch. Baxter Academy does not participate in any state or federal program for food service. Baxter does not provide breakfast at this time. Overall, food service expenditures were in line with budgeting for the year, and were higher this year than last year due to the increased student enrollment and student participation.

## Transportation

Three bus routes were in service for the 2014-15 school year. Bus 1 and Bus 2 consistently ran at capacity (28% of eligible students), while Bus 3 operated under capacity (15-17% of eligible students). The remaining students utilized public transportation, walked, or carpoled to Baxter. The bus routes changed slightly from Year 1 to Year 2; and one new stop was added during Year 2. Including the bus contract, tolls and fuel, the transportation costs for the 2014-15 school year were \$188,000.

For the next school year, Baxter Academy for Technology and Science plans to work to shift the bus routes to accommodate the large number of students who reside in the northern and western communities. They are working with parents to support and encourage the utilization of public transportation, including the Zoom Shuttle (traveling daily between Biddeford, Saco and Portland), the MetroBus and the Falmouth Flyer. Based upon data for current and incoming students, Baxter Academy expects to be able to hold their bus contract with Luce Transportation to three buses to transport those students who have no other feasible option for traveling to Baxter. Parent volunteers from each bus route are also working to arrange student carpools, to secure financial support from local businesses in their area, and to advocate for more extensive public transportation options.

### Section 11: Evidence of Mission and Vision Implementation

Mission
To be a rigorous, college preparatory high school promoting student ownership or learning through curriculum focused specifically on science, technology, engineering, and math.
Vision
To use a technology-rich, project-based learning approach to education at the secondary level.

Baxter Academy for Technology and Science students study complex, real world problems through the unique Flex Friday program, which this year included projects designing and building a 3-D printer, a dynamically stable bicycle, and a submersible robot. BA uses a technology-rich, project-based learning approach to education with all students using state-of-the art computer labs and Lenovo ThinkPad laptops equipped with industry-standard software. BA provides all students with an individualized, collaborative and interdisciplinary community of teachers who support students in mastering 21st-century skills such as problem-solving and field-based research tied to dynamic partnerships with local scientific institutes and STEM industry.

### Section 12: Commendations and Recommendations

#### Commendations:

- The Board expanded by the addition of two highly qualified individuals.
- The Executive Director and Head of School understand their respective positions as presently constituted and report that they have an effective working relationship in the new leadership staffing arrangement.

- Through the leadership of the Head of School, many teachers volunteered and successfully took on additional administrative responsibilities.
- Teachers are excited about their teaching, feel a sense of ownership, and a strong sense of community.
- Students respect their teachers who provide them with the opportunity of taking control of their own learning.
- Staff was added to provide services to students related to their social and emotional well-being, dual enrollment, and college and career planning.
- Project-based learning through Flex Fridays has been highly successful. Neighboring schools are exploring this program.
- Students feel comfortable and safe while respecting each other. The code of conduct, “Baxtitution”, is well understood and accepted by everyone.
- The school piloted a unique snow-day individualized program that was student designed, faculty approved, and aligned with standards that might be considered as a school day rather than a non-school day; this model is being explored by other schools.
- The school continues to provide a free and reduced meal program, without federal/state support to eligible students.

#### Recommendations:

The Commission continues to have concerns around the role of the board as it relates to administrating, oversight, policy-making, operations, and long-term planning for the success of the school. Although the governing board has reduced its involvement in the school's day-to-day operations, the over-arching goal for the coming year should be to confine its role to strategic planning, development, policy making, and oversight.

#### Other recommendations:

- Priority needs to be given to find one or more new board members with strong development capabilities.
- The school should continue its efforts to expand philanthropy from a full range of sources.
- The roles and the responsibilities of the Executive Director and Head of School need to be clarified to ensure that they function collaboratively as the top leadership team in implementing the school's policies and procedures and in the overseeing the conduct of day-to-day operations and decision making.
- Due to current enrollment figures and the need for review of space requirements, the governing board needs to continue to look ahead and project what the school will look like in the future regarding the location and size of the school's facilities, budget implications and how it will get there.
- The board needs to complete and execute a formal evaluation process for Executive Director and Head of School.
- A formal plan for implementing the Kim Marshall model for assessment of faculty and staff must be executed.
- Mission and Vision statements need to be clearly positioned on the website.
- The performance measures and metric indicators need to be completed and approved by the early fall.
- As stated in the Monitoring Plan, the school shall develop an improvement plan to address academic weaknesses by further analyzing state and local assessment data, and other means of assessment that have been used by the school.