***February 8, 2022 Business Meeting Minutes Approved by Commission Vote on***

***March 8, 2022***

The Maine Charter School Commission held a Regular Meeting on

**Tuesday, February 8, 2022**

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| **Item Number** | **Agenda Item** |
| **1** | **Call to Order and Declare a Quorum** |
|  | The meeting held via Zoom in accordance with the Commission’s Remote Meeting Policy, was called to order by Commission Chair, Wilson Hess at 1:01pm and a quorum was declared.  Commission members present were Wilson Hess, Nichi Farnham, Shelley Reed, Victoria Kornfield, Jim Rier, and Dr. Fern Desjardins *(joined at 2:02pm)*  Also present were Jeremy Jones, Gina Post, Lana Ewing, and Amy Allen |
| **2** | **Reminders** |
| 2a | This meeting is being recorded via Zoom. |
| 2b | We ask members of the public to hold comments until public comments are being heard. |
| 2c | When speaking, state your name and speak slowly and clearly and loudly enough for the captioner to pick up your comments. Gina will interrupt if the captioner is having a difficult time hearing what is being said. |
| **3** | **Additions or Adjustments to the Agenda** |
|  | Due to the change from an in-person meeting to a remote meeting, the Executive Session scheduled for the Executive Director Annual Evaluation (Item #11) will be rescheduled to a date and time to be determined later in the meeting. |
| **4** | **Requires Approval by the Commission** |
| 4a | To Consider the Approval of Minutes from the January 11, 2022 Business Meeting  A copy of the minutes was distributed for review.  **Moved by Shelley Reed; seconded by Nichi Farnham and voted unanimously by those present** to approve the minutes from the January 11, 2022 Business Meeting. |
| **5** | **Public Comment\*** |
|  | Dick Durost, Vice Chair of the Maine Arts Academy Governing Board, spoke in favor of continuing with the school liaison role stating that the Maine Arts Academy Board “really enjoys the relationship we have with our liaison” and “would strongly urge the Commission to continue with those positions”.  Judith Jones suggested that given the incredibly important element of public school options and public charter schools to promote growth in a variety of ways – not just academic growth – that the Commission look for ways to measure attendance. Specifically, how to compare prior attendance patterns and what public charter schools are doing to improve that attendance.  Linda Warner, member of the Maine Arts Academy Governing Board, spoke in favor of continuing with the school liaison role stating, “we feel it is our way of connecting with the Commission every month”.  Janna Townsend, member of the Maine Arts Academy Governing Board, spoke in favor of continuing with the school liaison role stating, “we find our liaison most helpful”. She also agreed with Judith Jones’ point that other measures of growth need to be explored. |
| **6** | **Presentations** |
|  | *None*  Chair Hess shared that invitations have been issued to all schools to present at future meetings. |
| **7** | **Executive Director/Commission Staff Report** |
| 7a | Progress on MeANS Charter Renewal  A copy of the Maine Academy of Natural Sciences’ Renewal Completion Timeline was distributed for review.  Jeremy highlighted the following:   * Staff have had two formal meetings with the MeANS Team, and several informal meetings to track progress toward renewal. * At least two more formal meetings will be held to track benchmarks – one will be the upcoming mid-year check-in meeting and one later in the spring; and * Staff has full confidence that the leaders at MeANS, both at the Board and School level, will be able to accomplish each of the conditions for renewal.   Victoria Kornfield requested a more detailed plan that outlines what will happen if conditions are not met. |
| 7b | Progress on CRCS Charter Renewal  Jeremy reminded the Commission of the following renewal conditions that were approved at the December Business Meeting:   * A Financial Audit to be completed by 12/31/21. * Resolution of Conflicts of Interest and Independence. * Facilitated Review of Organizational Bylaws. * Board Development; and * Board Reorganization   Staff have met with CRCS Board Chair, Danielle Denis, and with CRCS Executive Director, Travis Works, to discuss the renewal conditions and to track progress toward completion and Jeremy shared the following:   * CRCS has engaged with an external auditor to review the Board’s bylaws. This will be done in partnership with Commission staff and the cost split 50/50. * The CRCS Board has shared details of its Board Development Plan. The strength and implementation of that Plan will continue to be recurring topics during regularly scheduled discussions with Chair Denis. * CRCS satisfied the requirement to submit a copy of the FY21 Financial Audit by December 31, 2021.   A review of the most recent audit, along with information received in audits from previous years, resulted in concerns in the following areas:   * Facilities. * Oversight and Management of Accounts. * Auditor; and * Persistent Management Letter Comments.   A list of additional conditions to be met for renewal was presented for review. The Commission took no additional action during this meeting. |
| 7c | Review Process for Changes to Performance Framework for FY23  Jeremy shared that the Performance Framework is one of the primary tools that the Commission has available to monitor the performance of the charter schools and in accordance with the Strategic Plan, staff will be working to revise the current framework.  Gina shared the existing project timeline for the revisions and stressed that the revisions will be a collaborative process that will involve input and feedback from the Commission, governing boards, schools, and staff. The goal is to have a first reading of the proposed framework during the May Business Meeting, a second and final reading in June, and approved for schools to use beginning with the 2022-23 school year. |
| 7d | ED279 School Funding Discussion  A copy of the Department of Education’s proposed changes to the funding formula for the 2022-23 school year was presented for review and discussion.  Jim Rier led the discussion and expressed his concern regarding the impact the proposed changes will have on schools for not just the next school year but future years as well. Since the beginning of the pandemic, the state of Maine has lost almost 7,000 students from the public school system which will affect the funding for years to come. |
| 7e | Strategic Plan Update  Priority #1 – Accuplacer  Strategic Priority #1 is increasing student achievement and social emotional well-being. The NWEA MAP assessment is a sufficient tool for better understanding how operators are accelerating the learning of younger students, but we need a tool to better understand how high schools are preparing students for the next stages of their lives. Accuplacer is one tool that staff has identified that will do that. The Accuplacer measures the degree to which students are prepared to take rigorous college courses. It is a service to schools and students in that it provides them diagnostic data on where they might enter formal education after high school. It will also give us insight into the level of rigor the high schools are teaching. Even if a student chooses not to attend college, they will have a better idea of where they could start that journey and we will have more information about how high schools are preparing students for life based on the assumption that a more rigorous high school experience is better for the student regardless of his/her path after graduation.  Notes:   * 4 schools have volunteered to pilot the Accuplacer this school year (2021-22). * Schools have a choice of administering in the winter or in the spring. * There are a mix of juniors and seniors taking it. * We purchased 600 units at $2.30 per unit and have the option of purchasing more if needed. We had a savings in the overall cost of the NWEA as the MDOE has taken over the contract for many of the grade levels, so piloting the program didn’t come as an additional cost. * It takes about 30-45 minutes to complete one assessment and there’s one for math and one for reading.   Priority #2 – Board Training  Jeremy shared that we are partnering with the National Charter Schools Institute on this project and that it has been an all hands, on deck process over the last several months. We are on schedule to release the current content by the end of February and will be building and releasing content throughout the spring.  Notes:   * The training modules will be completed by each Board member using the existing Epicenter submission platform. * The curriculum is aligned with “Governing for Greatness” which is a book that was published by the Institute. It’s built with the national perspective but also with stuff that is very specific to Maine – grounded in Maine law and the Commission’s framework. * The training is self-paced and has a lot of reflection built into it. * The cost of the training modules is just under $16,000. * Board members will have access to technical support. * Staff will reach out to the Institute and ask if they’ll demo the training for the Commission at the next regular meeting.   Priority #5 – Enrollment  Strategic Priority #5 is about supporting charter schools with full enrollment and strengthening communications out in the field. A chart showing the October 1st enrollment at each of Maine’s public charter schools was reviewed. 7 out of the 10 charter schools are either under-enrolled or on the brink of being under-enrolled relative to their contracts with the Commission.  Notes:   * It is the charter school’s responsibility to ensure that they are fully enrolled, but the Commission can offer some support in this area. * Staff will meet with a communications team in Augusta to analyze enrollment data and see how we can best get the message out to parents about charter schools and how to enroll. * The best way to strengthen the charter school finances is being fully enrolled. |
| 7f | Media Update   * [Maine public school enrollment remains low after sharp decline in 2020](https://www.pressherald.com/2022/01/29/maine-public-school-enrollment-remains-low-after-sharp-decline-in-2020/)   Jeremy shared that this article speaks to the declining student enrollment around the state and ties into today’s conversations about funding. We have an opportunity to reach the students who have left the public education system, get them back into school, and learning. |
| 7g | Legislative Update  Jeremy shared that on February 2, 2022 he, along with Wilson Hess and Victoria Kornfield, had an opportunity to meet with the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee to answer questions about the Annual Commissioner’s Report and the monitoring of charter schools in general. Some takeaways from that conversation are as follows:   * Tools for Monitoring – Several questions were appropriately addressing “what does the charter commission do…” We have several methods to support charter school performance. From the renewal and contracting process to issuing annual reports and corrective action notices, we do have a process currently in place. Perhaps there are opportunities to strengthen and clarify that process, but there is a process, and we are following it. * We have shared concerns – Much of the lines of questioning were around chronic absenteeism and high school graduation. These are concerns that we share with the Committee and they are not new concerns. We need to clarify what thresholds we are comfortable with in these two domains and what action the Commission might take as a result of persistent shortcomings. * They want to see action – The actions we take should have substance. If we’re having the same conversation 365 days from now, we’ve failed.   Jeremy will be following up with Representative Brennan on some enrollment information that he requested. He will also share adopted conditions for both MeANS and CRCS so that the Committee has some additional insight into how we approach our work. |
| 7h | Liaison Role  Jeremy acknowledged the historical nature of the liaison process and indicated that now that both organizations have evolved – schools and the Commission – it is time to rethink the effectiveness of the liaison role as it’s currently defined. Lots of feedback has been received during the Public Comment portion of Commission meetings. Along with these comments a survey has been sent to all schools to gather additional feedback and staff will be connecting with the Attorney General’s Office for feedback as well.  The next stage in the process is to have a conversation with Commission members around the role, around the purpose of what the role is, and how we either continue the role in its current form or adjust the role based on the feedback we’ve received from schools and the advice received from the Attorney General’s Office. |
| 7i | MCSC Spending Report  A copy of the report was distributed for review.  Dr. Fern Desjardins had some questions regarding the relationship between this report and the Department’s monthly budget versus actual report. Amy explained that the Department’s report is a month or so behind when we receive it, while this new spending report is accurate within a few days of a scheduled Commission meeting and reflects all transactions sent through to the Service Center for payment. |
| **8** | **Old Business** |
| 8a | Committee Structure of Commission Members  A copy of the Committee Structure Proposal was distributed for review and discussion.  Jim Rier moved to adopt the proposed structure and the committee procedures, which include the process of working out a scope of work for each of the standing committees. Nichi Farnham seconded that motion.  The proposal was sent late and not all Commission members were prepared to vote on it. Chair Hess asked if Jim, who made the original motion, and Nichi, who seconded the original motion, would be comfortable tabling any action and further discussion until the next meeting.  **Motion by Jim Rier; seconded by Nichi Farnham and voted unanimously by those present** to table further action and discussion until the March 8, 2022 Business Meeting. |
| **9** | **Requires Notification to and Acceptance by the Commission** |
| 9a | The following resignations were announced:   * Resignation of Samantha Pedersen from the ACADIA Academy Governing Board * Resignation of Najean Shedyak from the Ecology Learning Center Governing Board * Resignation of Doug Lynch from the Fiddlehead School of Arts & Sciences’ Governing Board * Resignation of Nancy Andersen from the Harpswell Coastal Academy Governing Board   **Moved by Dr. Fern Desjardins; seconded by Jim Rier and voted unanimously by those present** to accept the resignations as presented. The Commission thanks all for their service. |
| 9b | To Consider and Accept FY22 Budget vs. Actual YTD – February Report  A copy of the report was distributed for review. Discussion circled back to the connection between this report and the Commission’s Spending Report.  **Moved by Jim Rider; seconded by Shelley Reed and voted unanimously by those present** to accept the FY22 Budget vs. Actual YTD – February Report. |
| **10** | **Monthly School Portfolio/Data Report** |
| 10a | Languages Other than English Spoken by Maine Families  A graph showing “Languages Other than English Spoken by Maine Families” was presented for review. Staff chose the top 10 languages on the graph and have provided translation resources to each of the charter schools so they will be prepared to assist any family who chooses to enroll. |
| 10b | NWEA MAP Analysis  Gina reported that she and Lana have been looking at diagnostic NWEA MAP data that schools were required to submit. Schools should be looking at baseline data, fall to fall data, spring to fall data, and new students/returning students. An analysis of the data currently available is as follows:  Math  Overall, math has the most room for improvement across all schools and grade levels. Specifically, Statistical Reasoning and Algebraic Reasoning are areas for growth (all grade levels). Geometric Reasoning is an area of strength at the early grade levels (K-3).  Projected Proficiency based on the NWEA Generic Linking Study shows the ten-school average Proficient or Advanced students at 53%, with a wide range from the lowest achieving to the highest achieving (29%-81%).  ELA-Reading  In English Language Arts, strengths are in Vocabulary Acquisition and Use (reading) and in Writing: Write, Revise Texts for Purpose of Audience (language use). Areas for growth are Key Ideas and Details (reading) and Understand, Edit for Mechanics (language use).  Projected Proficiency based on the NWEA Generic Linking Study shows the ten-school average Proficient or Advanced students at 64%, with a wide range from the lowest achieving to the highest achieving (55%-64%).  The next step will be to look at growth from fall to winter. Those results will be available in March. |
| **11** | **Executive Session** |
|  | *Tabled* |
| **12** | **Future Topics** |
| 12a | March   * Mid-Year Check-In Meeting Updates * Budget Discussion * Epicenter Upgrade Update * Modern Classrooms Project Update * School Feature – Ecology Learning Center * School Feature – Maine Arts Academy |
| **13** | **Announcements** |
| 13a | This Month’s Celebrations   * Jeremy announced that he has applied to graduate from law school. |
| 13b | Next Regular Business Meeting – March 8, 2022 *(Room #103A – Cross Office Building and Zoom)* |
| 13c | Reschedule Executive Director Annual Evaluation  The Special Meeting will be held on February 15, 2022 at 2:00pm at a location to be determined.  **Moved by Shelley Reed; seconded by Victoria Kornfield and voted unanimously by those present** to schedule a Special Meeting for the purpose of the annual Executive Director evaluation. |
| **14** | **Adjourn** |
|  | The meeting was adjourned at 4:42pm.  **Chair Hess declared adjournment at 4:42pm with no objections.** |

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**\*** *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.*