

# **ANNUAL REPORT TO THE COMMISSIONER**

December 2018

# Maine Charter School Commission

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*(Also State Board of Education)*

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Cornville Regional Charter School  
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[www.cornvilleregionalcharterschool.org](http://www.cornvilleregionalcharterschool.org)

Fiddlehead School of Arts & Sciences  
25 Shaker Road, Gray  
[www.fiddleheadschool.org](http://www.fiddleheadschool.org)

Harpwell Coastal Academy  
9 Ash Point Road, Harpswell  
[www.harpwellcoastalacademy.org](http://www.harpwellcoastalacademy.org)

Maine Academy of Natural Sciences  
16 Prescott Lane, Hinckley  
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Maine Arts Academy  
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Maine Connections Academy  
75 John Robert's Road, South Portland  
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Maine Virtual Academy  
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# Maine Charter School Commission

## **Annual Report to the Commissioner 2017-2018 School Year December 2018**

This Annual Report to the Commissioner is written to satisfy the requirement of MRSA Title 20-A, Chapter 112, §2405.4 Reporting and Evaluation, an authorizer shall submit to the Commissioner an annual report within 90 days of the end of each school fiscal year summarizing:

- A. The authorizer's strategic vision for chartering and progress toward achieving that vision;
- B. The performance of all operating public charter schools overseen by the authorizer, according to the performance measures and expectations specified in the charter contracts;
- C. The status of the authorizer's public charter school portfolio of approved charter applications, identifying all public charter schools within that portfolio as – approved, but not yet open; operating; renewed; transferred; terminated; closed; or never opened;
- D. The oversight and services provided by the authorizer to the public charter schools under the authorizer's purview; and
- E. The total amount of funds collected from each public charter school the authorizer authorized pursuant to subsection 5, paragraph B and the costs incurred by the authorizer to oversee each public charter school.

**A.**

**Mission:**

The mission of the Maine Charter School Commission (Commission) is to allow charter schools to be established as public schools that improve pupil learning by creating more high quality schools with high standards for pupil performance; that close achievement gaps between high-performing and low-performing groups of public school students; that increase high-quality educational opportunities within the public education system; that provide alternative learning environments for students who are not thriving in traditional school settings; that create new professional opportunities for teachers and other school personnel; that encourage the use of different, high-quality models of teaching and other aspects of schooling; and that provide students, parents, community members and local entities with expanded opportunities for involvement in the public education system.

This mission is being accomplished in a number of different ways. The Commission has formally adopted Rule 90-668 Chapter 1: Commission Organization and Operation that guides how the Commission will organize and operate; Rule 90-668 Chapter 2: Procedures for Commission Authorization of Public Charter Schools; and Rule 90-668 Chapter 3: Procedures for Charter School Renewal. Chapter 3 was created to have a procedure established for the renewal process. In 2017, three schools completed the renewal process – Baxter Academy for Technology and Science; Fiddlehead School of Arts & Sciences; and Harpswell Coastal Academy.

**Charter School Approval Process:**

The charter school must submit a charter application for establishing a charter school as described in the Maine Charter School Commission’s Request for Proposals.

After the receipt of a charter school application, the approval includes a four step process:

1. The first step is a completeness review. Applications judged not complete are returned to the sponsor for errors or omissions to be corrected within 5 days.
2. Those applications deemed to be complete then move to the second step, approval for continued review. A Review Team, comprised of three (3) Commission members, assisted by technical experts, as needed, review each application and rate it using the evaluative criteria in the RFP. Using the scoring rubric as a tool, the Team develops a recommendation for consideration by the full Commission to determine merit for continued review.
3. The applicants approved for continued review then move to the third step which includes an interview with the Commission and a public hearing.
4. In the final step, the Commission reviews the findings from the review of the application, the information received from the interview and the public hearing and makes a decision to approve or deny the application.

In the summer of 2017, the National Association for Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) conducted a

thorough Authorizer Evaluation (*see Appendix*) of the Commission's oversight activities and offered several recommendations to improve the RFP process. In addition, the Commission hired Dr. David Silvernail to complete additional research on the Commission's activities (*See Appendix*) To give ample time to review and implement these recommendations, the Commission decided not to issue an RFP for schools opening in the fall of 2019.

In the 2018-19, Maine students have the opportunity to choose to receive their education from nine public charter schools, each offering a different educational focus:

- ACADIA Academy serves grades K-4 with a focus on direct instruction and hands-on learning;
- Baxter Academy for Technology and Science serves grades 9-12 with a focus on science, technology, engineering and math;
- Cornville Regional Charter School serves grades preK-10 with a focus on standards-based instruction;
- Fiddlehead School of Arts & Sciences serves preK-5 using the Emilia Reggio philosophy;
- Harpswell Coastal Academy serves grades 6-12 with a focus on project-based learning;
- Maine Academy of Natural Sciences serves grades 9-12 with a focus on agriculture and forestry;
- Maine Arts Academy (*formerly Snow Pond Arts Academy*) serves grades 9-12 with a focus on the performing arts.
- Maine Connections Academy serves grades 7-12 through a virtual platform;
- Maine Virtual Academy serves grades 7-12 through a virtual platform;

#### **Legislative Process:**

In addition to its work managing the RFP process, authorizing of new charter schools, and overseeing all charter schools, the Commission was engaged in the legislative process. The Commission introduced the work of the Commission in implementing the law and meeting its authorization and monitoring responsibilities to legislators; monitored legislative proposals that might affect charter schools or amend the charter school law; provided testimony to assist the legislative committee as it considered proposed legislation and was available to address requests for information.

#### **Monitoring:**

The Commission also maintained close communication with the approved charter schools and attended important functions at the charter schools. The Commission conducted the required monitoring responsibilities. These included Pre-Opening and 90-Day Reviews, as well as an extensive end-of-year review with each charter school. Schools in the last year of their current charter contract underwent additional visits, an interview and a public hearing as part of the renewal process.

#### **Commission Activities:**

In addition to monthly meetings (*see Calendar in Appendix*), Commission members were available to media representatives responding to inquiries, as well as contributing to a better public understanding of the charter school law and transparency of Commission activities.

The Commission was fully engaged in the development of rules and the rewriting of RFPs. Commission members maintained a record of excellent attendance at the Commission's regular monthly business meetings, workshops and also at all special meetings of the Commission. Each of these responsibilities required many hours of voluntary labor.

In October 2017, four (4) members of the Commission and two staff attended the NACSA Annual Conference in Phoenix, Arizona to attend workshops and sessions to assist in developing and maintaining policies and practices consistent with nationally recognized principles and professional standards for authorizing public schools.

**Staff:**

Supporting the Commission were three administrative employees – Senior Support Coordinator, Director of Program Management and Executive Director.

Collaboratively, the staff: provide preparation for meetings, notifications, agendas and minutes; maintain records and correspondence of the Commission; analyze and evaluate charter school data; write monitoring reports; provide research and analysis; communicate with charter schools to strengthen their performance; provide feedback to schools regarding accountability metrics; review schools' performance and legal compliance; assist the Commission in developing policies and procedures; serve as a liaison between the Commission and the Maine Department of Education, Legislature, and Attorney General's Office; provide research and analysis; monitor charter contracts for compliance; manage Commission income and expenses; and work with the Commission throughout the charter application process.

**Strategic Plan:**

The Charter Commission annually reviews its work from the previous year for the purpose of continuous improvement of its efforts to oversee the public charter schools. This review results in the Commission's strategic plan for the following year. In 2017, the Commission underwent a rigorous Authorizer Evaluation conducted by the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA). The Commission has begun to address the following recommendations:

1. Clarify roles - Commission/staff
2. Hire and train application reviewers
3. Establish new performance framework
4. Contract a finance person
5. Revisit charter contract
6. Revise new charter application
7. Develop criteria to be met in order to be eligible to apply for expansion/replication
8. Revise renewal application and process
9. Differentiate monitoring and oversight



**Sub-Committees:**

In addition to the work done by the full Commission, the Commission established sub-committees. These sub-committees consisted of 2-3 Commission members, and also included staff as appropriate. The Commission also created standing committees for Finance and Policy.

**B.**

**The performance of all operating public charter schools overseen by the Maine Charter School Commission, according to the performance measures and expectations specified in the charter contracts:**

The Commission conducts a comprehensive 90 day visit to new schools, schools that are operating in a new location and schools that have new programs. During the 2017-2018 school year, four visits were conducted. Reports were generated and approved by the Commission. *(The reports are included with this document.)*

A final, year-end monitoring review was also conducted for each school. This included a presentation of the required data, as well as visits to the public charter schools with interviews, and observations. A report with findings was generated and accepted by the Commission. *(The final report for each school is included with this document.)*

**C.**

**The status of the authorizer’s public charter school portfolio of approved charter applications, identifying all public charter schools within that portfolio as:**

(1) Approved:     None

(2) Operating:

- ❖ ACADIA Academy (September 2016)
- ❖ Baxter Academy for Technology and Science (September 2013)
- ❖ Cornville Regional Charter School (October 2012)
- ❖ Fiddlehead School of Arts & Sciences (September 2013)
- ❖ Harpswell Coastal Academy (September 2013)
- ❖ Maine Academy of Natural Sciences (October 2012)
- ❖ Maine Connections Academy (September 2014)
- ❖ Maine Virtual Academy (September 2015)
- ❖ Snow Pond Arts Academy (September 2016)

(3) Renewed:

- ❖ Baxter Academy for Technology and Science (November 2017)
- ❖ Fiddlehead School of Arts & Sciences (November 2017)
- ❖ Harpswell Coastal Academy (November 2017)

(4) Transferred:       None

(5) Terminated:       None

(6) Closed:            None

(7) Never Opened:     None

**D.**

**The oversight and services provided by the Maine Charter School Commission to the public charter schools under the authorizer's purview:**

The Commission provides oversight of the authorized charter schools through end-of-year monitoring visits. Additionally, charter schools are required to provide information periodically during the year, as well as end-of-year-data. *(See Calendar in Appendix)*

In the past year, the Commission made pre-opening visits to Baxter Academy for Technology and Science, Cornville Regional Charter School, Maine Academy of Natural Sciences, and Snow Pond Arts Academy. Representing the Commission was a team of Commission members, assisted by Department of Education Special Services team member(s), and Commission staff. In general, the three-member teams of Commission members assigned to review an application continues to serve that public charter school conducting the monitoring and visits for compliance with the Contract – which includes the Application, Pre-Opening Plan, Monitoring Plan, Performance Indicators and Closure Plan.

The pre-opening visits included Governing Board members and administration at which the schools' contracted pre-opening plan was reviewed for completeness and authorization to open. *(The Pre-Opening Visit reports are attached.)*

During the first year of operation – the opening of the school; a new location; or new program -- the Commission Review Team administers a 90-day visit at the school. For the 2017-2018 school year, Baxter Academy for Technology and Science *(new location)*, Cornville Regional Charter School *(new programs)*, Maine Academy of Natural Sciences *(new program)*, and Snow Pond Arts Academy *(review of School Improvement Plan)* required 90-day visits. The team reviewed data provided by the schools, toured the schools and observed classes and activities; all to assess the schools' progress in implementing their proposed educational and organizational plans. *(The 90-Day Visit Reports are attached.)*

At the end of the school year, an annual on-site visit was conducted and an annual monitoring report was written. The Review Team measured progress on attainment of the charter schools' Performance Indicators in the Charter School Contract.

The Commission conducts periodic visits to the schools during the year, unannounced and scheduled, as well as email and telephone conferencing with school personnel. These are for the purpose of providing support to the schools; maintaining an awareness of the schools' activities, procedures and programs; and responding to questions or need for information. As reports are received from the school during the year, they are reviewed and the records are retained.

Members of the Commission were present at charter school events such as:

- ✓ Site Visits;
- ✓ Enrollment Lotteries;
- ✓ Pre-Opening Reviews;
- ✓ 90 Day Reviews;
- ✓ End-of-Year Visits;
- ✓ Graduation ceremonies.

MCSC staff maintained communication with each school throughout the year and provided assistance to each school as needed. In addition to the oversight activities, the Commission staff supported programs to assist the charter schools as needed.

**E.**

**The total amount of funds collected from each public charter school the Maine Charter School Commission authorized and the costs incurred by the authorizer to oversee each public school.**

By law, the Commission is allowed to receive up to 3% of annual per-pupil allocations received by each public charter school that it authorizes. These funds must be used to cover the costs for the Commission to oversee its public charter schools. Currently, the Commission takes only 2.25%.

The revenue received from the Department of Education based on the Essential Programs and Services (EPS) formula in FY18 was \$388,472 of which \$333,515 was used to pay the Commission per diem, fund professional development for the Commission and staff, engage professional and administrative staff and to fund activities to oversee public charter schools. The balance has been carried into FY 2019.

Professional development of the Commission and staff is to assure that the Commission, in its operation, adheres faithfully to the requirement of the Public Charter School Law that authorizers meet nationally recognized principles and professional standards.

*Also attached to this report are FY18 year to date expenditures – Other Special Revenue Funds; FY18 expenditures by vendor – Other Special Revenue Funds; FY19 approved budget; and FY19 budget guideline.*

# Appendix A

## *Organizational Chart*

# Appendix B

*2017-2018 Calendar*



# Appendix C

*FY18 Year to Date Expenditures – Other Special  
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# Appendix D

*FY18 Expenditures by Vendor – Other Special Revenue  
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*Budget FY19*

# Appendix F

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*Number of Students Attending Maine Public Charter  
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*Number of Students Attending Maine Public Charter  
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# Appendix I

*ACADIA Academy Annual Monitoring Report*

# Appendix J

*Baxter Academy for Technology and Science Pre-Opening Report for New Location*



# Appendix K

*Baxter Academy for Technology and Science 90 Day  
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# Appendix L

*Baxter Academy for Technology and Science Annual  
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*Cornville Regional Charter School Pre-Opening Report  
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*Cornville Regional Charter School 90 Day Report for  
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*Cornville Regional Charter School Annual Monitoring  
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# Appendix P

*Fiddlehead School of Arts & Sciences Annual  
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# Appendix Q

*Harpswell Coastal Academy Annual Monitoring Report*

# Appendix R

*Maine Academy of Natural Sciences Pre-Opening  
Report for New Program*



# Appendix S

*Maine Academy of Natural Sciences 90 Day Report for  
New Program*

# Appendix T

*Maine Academy of Natural Sciences Annual Monitoring  
Report*

# Appendix U

*Maine Connections Academy Year 4 Performance  
Report*

# Appendix V

*Maine Virtual Academy Annual Monitoring Report*

# Appendix W

*Snow Pond Arts Academy 2<sup>nd</sup> Year Pre-Opening Report*

# Appendix X

*Snow Pond Arts Academy 2<sup>nd</sup> Year 90 Day Report*

# Appendix Y

*Snow Pond Arts Academy Annual Monitoring Report*

# Appendix Z

*National Association of Charter School Authorizers  
(NACSA) Authorizer Evaluation Report*



# Appendix AA

*Silver Analytics Part 1 Report*