

Maine Charter School Commission

# ANNUAL REPORT TO THE COMMISSIONER

November 2017



# Maine Charter School Commission

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## Maine Public Charter Schools:

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12 Westminster Street  
Lewiston, ME 04240  
<http://www.acadiaacademy.org/>

Baxter Academy for Technology and Science  
185 Lancaster Street, Portland 04101  
[www.Baxter-Academy.org](http://www.Baxter-Academy.org)

Cornville Regional Charter School  
1192 West Ridge Road, Cornville 04976  
[www.CornvilleRegionalCharterSchool.org](http://www.CornvilleRegionalCharterSchool.org)

Fiddlehead School of Arts and Science  
25 Shaker Road, Gray 04039  
[www.Fiddleheadschool.org](http://www.Fiddleheadschool.org)

Harpswell Coastal Academy  
9 Ash Point Road Harpswell 04079  
[www.HarpswellCoastalAcademy.org](http://www.HarpswellCoastalAcademy.org)

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## Websites:

Maine Charter School Commission site  
<http://www.maine.gov/csc>

Department of Education Charter Schools:  
<http://maine.gov/doe/charterschools/index/html>

Maine Academy of Natural Sciences  
16 Prescott Lane, Hinckley 04944  
[www.Means-gwh.org](http://www.Means-gwh.org)

Maine Connections Academy  
75 John Robert's Road, Suite 11B  
South Portland 04106  
[www.MaineConnectionsAcademy.com](http://www.MaineConnectionsAcademy.com)

Maine Virtual Academy  
6 Chestnut Street, Augusta 04333  
[www.mainevirtual.org](http://www.mainevirtual.org)

Snow Pond Arts Academy  
8 Goldenrod Road  
Sidney, ME 04330  
<http://www.snowpondartsacademy.org>



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## Annual Report to the Commissioner 2016-2017 School Year November 2017

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. The Maine Charter School Commission's strategic vision for chartering and progress toward achieving that vision:**

**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 Charter 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 2016, two schools completed the renewal process – Cornville Regional Charter School and Maine Academy of Natural Sciences.

**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 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.

The RFP for schools opening in the fall of 2018 was issued on May 30, 2017. 2 schools filed an Intent to Apply, neither submitted a complete application by the due date. Currently, 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-3 (planning to add grade 4 in the coming school year) 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-12 with a focus on standards-based instruction;
- Fiddlehead School of Arts and 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 Connections Academy serves grades 7-12 through a virtual platform;
- Maine Virtual Academy serves grades 7-12 through a virtual platform;
- Snow Pond Arts Academy serves grades 9-12 with a focus on the performing arts.



### **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. The Commission presented its budget to both the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee and the Appropriations and Cultural Affairs Committee.

### **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 with the newly opened schools, as well as an extensive end-of-year review with each charter school.

### **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 conducted a well-attended clinic on Maine's Charter School Law and public charter schools at the Maine School Management Association Annual Fall Conference, October 2016.

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 2016, four members of the Commission and two staff attended the National Association for Charter School Authorizer's (NACSA) Annual Conference in Atlanta, Georgia 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 charter schools.

### **Staff:**

Supporting the Commission were three administrative employees – Administrative Assistant, Director of Program Management, and Executive Director.

The Administrative Assistant provides preparation for meetings, notifications, agendas and minutes, and maintains the growing amount of records and correspondence of the Commission supports the Director of Program Management and Executive Director, and other duties.

The Director of Program Management assists the Commission with many tasks, which include review of charter applications; analyzing and evaluating charter school data, writing of monitoring reports, providing research and analysis, communicating with charter schools to strengthen their performance;

providing feedback to schools regarding accountability metrics; reviewing schools' performance; and legal compliance.

The Executive Director assists the Commission on many levels, particularly in developing policies and procedures. The Executive Director serves as a liaison between the Commission and the Maine Department of Education, Legislature, and Attorney General's Office; provides research and analysis; monitors charter contracts for compliance; manages Commission income and expenses; and works 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.

The 2016-2017 Maine Charter School Commission Strategic Plan was to address the following:

- Goal 1 Implement Renewal Process
- Goal 2 Clarify Commission's Role
- Goal 3 Plan for the Future
- Goal 4 Review and Develop Policies and Procedures
- Goal 5 Create a Long Term Financial Plan

**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 Charter Commission conducts a comprehensive Interim Monitoring Review visit to each public charter school within the first 90 days of the school's operation. During the 2016-2017 school year, two interim visits were conducted. Reports were generated and approved by the Commission. *(The interim reports are included with this document).*

A final, year-end Performance Monitoring Review was also conducted for each school. This included a presentation of the required data, as well as two visits to the public charter school with interviews, and observations. A report with findings was generated and accepted by the Commission. *(This 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:

(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:

- ❖ Cornville Regional Charter School (*November, 2016*)
- ❖ Maine Academy of Natural Sciences (*November, 2016*)

- (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 Charter 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 ACADIA Academy and Snow Pond Arts Academy. Representing the Charter Commission was a team of Charter Commission members, assisted by a Department of Education Special Education team member, as well as Charter Commission staff. In general, the three-member teams of Charter 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 Commission Review Team administers a 90-day visit at the school. These half-day interim visits are held during the first ninety days of the opening of the school. For the 2016-2017 school year, ACADIA Academy and Snow Pond Arts Academy 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 Charter 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, 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 Charter Commission were present at charter school events such as:

- site visits;
- enrollment lotteries conducted by schools ;
- pre-opening reviews at ACADIA Academy and Snow Pond Arts Academy approved for opening in September 2016;
- 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 Charter Commission supported programs to assist the charter schools. Workshops included proficiency-based diploma, special education, certification, school security, transportation, and data collection.

In February 2016, the Maine Charter School Commission scored 12 of 12 points on National Association of Charter School Authorizers' (NACSA) Index of Essential Practices. Each year, NACSA releases the Index, its analysis of how well authorizers across the nation are implementing the 12 practices that are critical to fulfilling the responsibilities of being an authorizer. *(Letter of Recognition is attached.)*

**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 charter 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. In November 2016, MCSC voted to take only 2.25%. In addition the MCSC returned funds to each school totaling \$428,000.

The revenue received from the Department of Education based on the Essential Program S (EPS) formula in FY 17 was \$581,538.57 of which \$304,007 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 2018.

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 FY17 year to date expenditures – Other Special Revenue Funds; FY17 expenditures by vendor – Other Special Revenue Funds; FY18 approved budget; and FY18 budget guideline.*

