

Fiddlehead School 90-Day “Visit” (via Zoom)

On July 1, 2019, the Maine Charter School Commission approved an amendment request from Fiddlehead School for an expansion to grades 7 and 8. Grade 7 was added for the 2020-2021 school year and grade 8 is to be added the following school year.

On December 14, 2020, Maine Charter School Commission staff and school liaison met with representatives from Fiddlehead school via Zoom for a 90-day visit to discuss the school’s addition of the 7th grade.

Fiddlehead School:

- Douglas Lynch, Fiddlehead School board member
- William Doughty, Fiddlehead School board chair
- Jacinda Cotton-Castro, Fiddlehead School Executive Director

Maine Charter School Commission:

- Shelley Reed, Maine Charter School Commission Liaison
- Gina Post, Maine Charter School Commission staff

Enrollment

The school had projected the 7th grade enrollment for 16 students, which was the number used in the school’s budget. The actual enrollment for the 7th grade is 14 students. The school representatives indicated that the slightly lower enrollment was not a budgetary concern.

The school currently has enough space, having recently purchased the building, and is exploring options for next year when 8th grade is added. One option is using 2 new learning spaces created for managing teaching and learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. These are the new Zoom Room and yurt. The school has found outdoor learning to be a way of moving closer toward its mission and using nature as part of the learning experience.

Staffing

In the document submitted by the school prior to the visit, it was said, “. . . we have hardly noticed that we added a 7th grade.” The smooth transition was partially because the “new” 7th grade teacher taught 6th grade at Fiddlehead last year. A new teacher was hired for grade 6. The grade 5, 6 and 7 teachers are working together, with one teacher teaching the math classes, his area of expertise, and the other two teaching Integrated Studies. A Teacher Assistant is shared between grades 6 and 7.

Special Education

Fiddlehead has struggled to have a complete special education staff. The school recently hired 2 teacher assistants and hopes to hire a second special education teacher to work with the upper grades to begin after the turn of the year. There is a teacher in place for the lower grades. The school’s special education coordinator is tracking direct instruction services and the school will provide compensatory services to any student who is not receiving instruction. The school is using some past literacy consultants to help with remote instruction.

504/EL

With the school’s new social worker (LCSW) accommodations are being met for students who need it. It was reported in the meeting that the social worker has formed strong relationships with students and parents and has been a resource for staff as well. The school does not have any English learners.

Family Response

A survey administered in November 2020, indicated that parents were happy with the 7th grade. It is expected that the 7th grade students will be next year’s 8th graders, at which time the school will be fully matriculated.