

Harpswell Coastal Academy 90-Day “Visit” (via Zoom)

On October 8, 2019, the Maine Charter School Commission approved an amendment request from Harpswell Coastal Academy for an expansion to grade 5 beginning in the 2020-2021 school year.

On December 15, 2020, Maine Charter School Commission staff and school liaison met with representatives from Harpswell Coastal Academy via Zoom for a 90-day visit to discuss the school’s addition of the 5th grade.

Harpswell Coastal Academy:

- Cynthia Shelmerdine, governing board chair
- Scott Barksdale, Head of School

Maine Charter School Commission:

- Fern Desjardins, Maine Charter School Commission Liaison
- Gina Post, Maine Charter School Commission staff

Enrollment

The school had projected the 5th grade enrollment as 11 students. The actual enrollment for the 5th grade is 18 students. The 18 students bring the “Curtis House” (grades 5 and 6) enrollment to 30, which is the number of students the school hoped for in that house.

The school currently has enough space to offer in-person learning with physical distancing to all those who choose it, with some students choosing to learn remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Staffing

Harpswell Coastal Academy did not have to hire new teachers for the new 5th grade. The Curtis House has 2 teachers, a humanities teacher and a STEM teacher. One teacher is last year’s 6th grade teacher and the other taught in another house at the school last year.

Each student at Harpswell Coastal Academy belongs to a crew of mixed grade levels. At the 90-day visit the Head of School shared that there were some developmental things to navigate with having grades 5-8 in the crews, and that the 5th graders contributed a lot to the school’s climate and culture.

This year, largely due to the COVID-19 pandemic, an additional bus route was added and there is now one bus route for Division 1 (grades 5-8) and another for Divisions 2 and 3 (high school). It was reported that this is working well and allows for the school’s youngest students to ride a bus separate from the school’s oldest students.

Special Education

The school has a special education teacher for Curtis House. The caseload is small. Division 1 has a special education percentage of 15%, while Divisions 2 and 3 have a percentage of 31%.

504/EL

The school’s social worker (LCSW) spends one day per week at Division 1 and meets the needs of the students who have a 504 or other needs. The social worker spends the other days at Divisions 2 and 3.

Plans for 2021-2022

Curtis House, like other Harpswell Coastal Academy houses, has a curriculum built into a 2-year alternating model of an A Year and a B year. The school’s teachers, administration, and governing board are in the early stages of planning next year’s B Year curriculum.