

Maine Charter School Commission

September, 2016

On May 18 and July 8, 2016, announced on-site visits were made to Maine Connections Academy public charter school. The Maine Charter School Commission (MCSC) review team of 3 members was accompanied by the MCSC Executive Director, MCSC Director of Program Management, and Department of Education Special Services team member. The visiting team held interviews with school leadership, staff, students, parents, community partners, and the school's Governing Board. They also reviewed data provided by the school. Documents provided by the school are available from the MCSC office. Information gathered from documents, interviews, and on-site observation was used to determine the extent to which the school has met its contracted performance targets.

Commission Member, Review Team Chair	Mike Wilhelm
Commission	Nichi Farnham
Commission	Laurie Pendleton
MCSC Executive Director	Bob Kautz
MCSC Director of Program Management	Gina Post
DOE Special Services team member	Roberta Lucas

The Maine State Charter School Commission will provide thoughtful stewardship in authorizing and monitoring public charter schools consistent with State statutes to create unique, high-quality learning options for Maine students.

Maine Charter School Commission

ANNUAL MONITORING REPORT

September 2016

Section 1: School Overview

School Name	Maine Connections Academy (MCA)
Address	75 John Roberts Road South Portland, Maine 04106

Board Chair	Amy Linscott
Interim Head of School	Doug Bourget
Special Education Director	Patricia Joy Kiely

Year Opened	School year 2014-2015
Years in Operation	2
Number of Sending Districts	106
Grades Served	7-12
Number of Students	390 (Oct. 1 count, 2015)
Student - teacher Ratio	23:1

Mission	The mission of Maine Connections Academy (MCA) is to help each student maximize his or her potential and meet the highest performance standards through a uniquely individualized learning program in grades 7-12 throughout the state of Maine for students who need an alternative to the traditional classroom.
Vision	The vision of MCA will be to reach students for whom a cutting-edge virtual approach provides the very best pathway to school success through a uniquely individualized learning program that combines the best in virtual education with very real connections among students, family, teachers, and the community to promote academic and emotional success for every learner.

Section 2: Indicator Summary Table

Indicator	Meets Contract agreement	Partially meets	Does not meet
Student Academic Proficiency ¹			
Student Academic Growth		X ²	
Achievement Gaps in proficiency and growth between major student subgroups ³			
Student Attendance		X ⁴	
Recurrent Enrollment from Year to Year	X		
Post-Secondary Readiness	X		
Financial Performance and Sustainability	X		
Governance Board Performance and Stewardship	X		
Adequacy of Facilities Maintenance in Support of Program	X		
Transportation	X		
School Social and Academic Climate	X		
Parent and Community Engagement	X		

¹ State test results for 2016 are not yet available

² The percentage of students showing growth in reading in grades 7-8 on the LEAP declined from 67.1% in 2014-15 to 58.8% in 2015-16. The percent of students showing growth in math in grades 9-12 on the Scantron decreased from 68.8% in 2014-15 to 63.8% in 2015-16, and the percent of students showing growth in reading in grades 9-12 on the Scantron decreased from 92.3% in 2014-15 to 59.3% in 2015-16.

³ MCA will use 2015-16 data to establish a baseline for achievement gaps in proficiency and growth between major subgroups.

⁴ The Average Daily Attendance target of 93% for grades 7-8 was not met (gr. 7-8 ADA = 90%). The Average Attendance Rate target of 93% for students in grades 7-8 was not met (AAR = 91.5%).

Section 3: Academics

Targets:

Student Academic Proficiency:

State Assessments

- Percentage of students at proficiency level will increase every year by at least 2% points over the prior year. Year 2 students will be at 90% of state average for those students at met or above.

School Developed Assessments

- School specified assessment - data, formative and viewed as support for staff.

Student Academic Growth:

- Target of 2% annual growth expected for continuously enrolled students. LEAP 75% score on the LEAP post-test or a 10% point gain from their pretest score will be 85% or higher, or will increase 5% points each year until it reaches 85%.
- Establish benchmarks for each student

Achievement Gaps in proficiency and growth between major student subgroups:

- Achievement gaps in proficiency and growth between major subgroups using ESEA-based system

Performance:

State test results for 2016 are not yet available.

On the formative data used as the school's local assessment for student academic proficiency, 2015-16 middle school level failure rates increased in the fall across all subject areas when compared to 2014-15 data. In 2015-16, high school failure rates decreased across all subject areas when compared to 2014-15. There was a similar trend during second semester; however, middle school failure rates did decrease in science. Again, the failure rates at the high school level decreased across all subject areas. MCA's student enrollment increased from 256 in 2014-15 to 390 in 2015-16, an increase of 52%.

MCA Fall Semester Results Year-to-Year Comparison (Enrolled on or before 10/1)					
Subject/Grade	A	B	C	D	F
Language Arts					
Grades 7-8					
2014-2015 Final	22%	29%	27%	14%	7%
2015-2016 Final	22%	25%	13%	17%	22%
Grades 9-12					
2014-2015 Final	27%	30%	16%	13%	15%
2015-2016 Final	16%	35%	20%	19%	10%
Mathematics					
Grades 7-8					
2014-2015 Final	17%	31%	20%	19%	13%
2015-2016 Final	17%	25%	14%	23%	23%
Grades 9-12					
2014-2015 Final	9%	24%	31%	19%	18%
2015-2016 Final	16%	35%	16%	20%	14%
Science					
Grades 7-8					
2014-2015 Final	22%	30%	22%	14%	13%
2015-2016 Final	36%	21%	19%	9%	16%
Grades 9-12					
2014-2015 Final	21%	38%	19%	12%	10%
2015-2016 Final	31%	38%	15%	10%	5%
Social Studies					
Grades 7-8					
2014-2015 Final	17%	35%	26%	15%	7%
2015-2016 Final	17%	19%	24%	16%	24%
Grades 9-12					
2014-2015 Final	45%	25%	13%	3%	14%
2015-2016 Final	42%	32%	12%	8%	6%

Students in grades 7 and 8 completed the LEAP test in both math and reading. Students in grades 9-12 completed the Scantron Performance Series (SPS) in both math and reading. Students were included below if they had both a pretest and posttest score in Connexus, the Connections data system. Growth for the LEAP test is defined as having a score of at least 75% on the posttest or improving by at least 10 percentage points from pretest to posttest. Growth for the Scantron Performance Series is defined as having a score at High Average or Above Average on the posttest, maintaining Above Average or improving by at least one level of normative scores from pretest to posttest.

The percentage of students showing growth in math in grades 7-8 on the LEAP increased from 57.7% in 2014-15 to 63.6% in 2015-16, meeting the target. The percentage of students showing growth in reading in grades 7-8 on the LEAP declined from 67.1% in 2014-15 to 58.8% in 2015-16. Although MCA did not meet the target in this area, the average posttest score did improve slightly from 69 in 2014-15 to 71.1 in 2015-16. The percentage of students completing the LEAP math decreased by 29%, and by 33% in reading (78 to 55, and 76 to 51, respectively). The percentage of students completing the Scantron math increased by 21%, and increased by 13% in reading (48 to 58, and 52 to 59, respectively).

	LEAP Math	LEAP Reading	Scantron Math	Scantron Reading
Number of Students	55	51	58	59
Pretest Results: Average Score for LEAP % scoring High Average or Above Average for SPS	43.1	66.7	56.3	78.2
Posttest Results: Average Score for LEAP % scoring High Average or Above Average for SPS	59.5	71.1	63.8	71.2
% with Growth	63.6	58.8	63.8	59.3

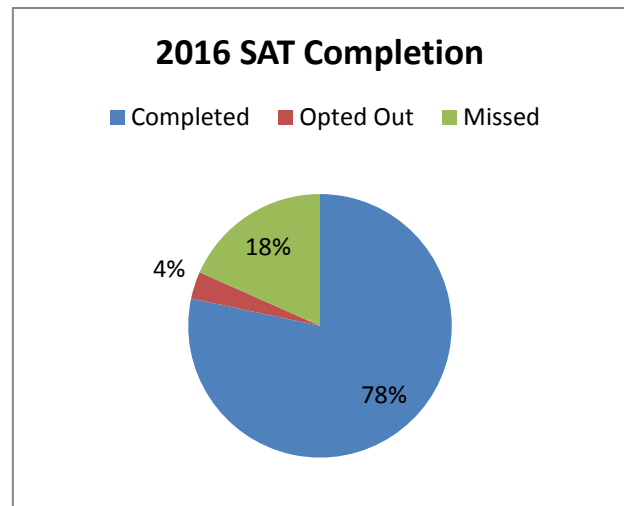
The percent of students showing growth in math in grades 9-12 on the Scantron decreased from 68.8% in 2014-15 to 63.8% in 2015-16, and the percent of students showing growth in reading in grades 9-12 on the Scantron decreased from 92.3% in 2014-15 to 59.3% in 2015-16. The target was not met in this area.

Each student received a welcome call at the beginning of the school year. During that call, the teacher discovered and documented learning styles, interests, preferences and barriers. School Counselors reviewed previous years' academic records. In the first few weeks of school students took a diagnostic assessment (LEAP, Scantron, Think Through Math or Reading Plus) to establish a baseline and identify targeted areas of need. From that data, students were placed into appropriate courses and provided Supplemental Instructional Support Programming (SISP) threaded into a content course if necessary.

MCA will use 2015-16 data to establish a baseline for achievement gaps in proficiency and growth between major subgroups.

SAT participation was 78.33%. Of 60 students, 2 opted out, 11 missed the test, and 47 completed the test.

MCA's average score for Evidence-Based Reading and Writing was 517. MCA's average score for Math was 471. State and National averages are not yet available for comparison.



Section 4: Enrollment & Attendance

Targets:

- Average Daily Attendance Rate of 93% for grades 7 and 8, and 92% for grades 9-12
- Individual Student Attendance Rate
- Unexcused Absences
- Retention rate of 70% of students during the school year
- 50% of students to be re-enrolled from one year to the next
- Continuous enrollment of students for multiple years

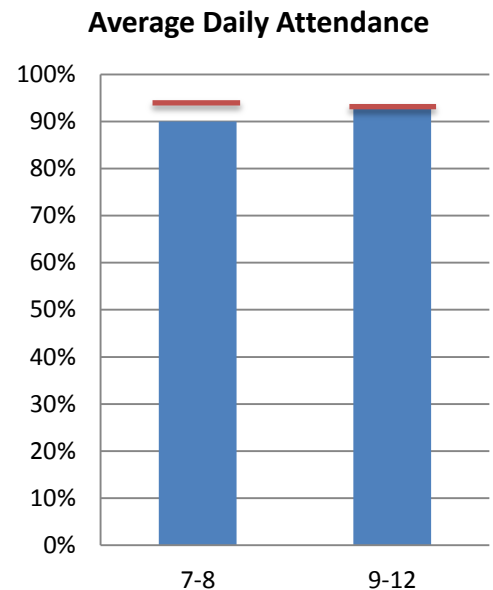
Performance:

The average daily attendance rate for students in grades 7 - 8 was 90%, falling shy of the target of 93%. The average daily attendance rate for students in grades 9 -12 was 92%, meeting the target of 92%.

The average attendance rate for students in grades 7 - 8 was 91.5%. The average attendance rate for students in grades 9 - 12 was 94.2%. Based on the average individual student attendance rate, the target of 92% for grades 9-12 was met, but the target of 93% for grades 7-8 was not met.

The majority of students had an attendance rate above 90%. However, seven students had an attendance rate that is less than 25%. There were 17 students who had an attendance rate below 50% and 26 students who had an attendance rate below 75%.

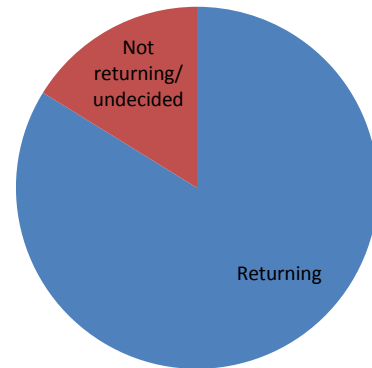
Six students were considered habitually truant; having missed more than ½ of the school year, and 20 students had one or more instances of unexcused absences.



Intent to Re-enroll

The during-school year retention rate was 82%; a 5-percentage point improvement over the 2014-2015 retention rate of 77%. MCA met the target of a during-school year retention rate of 70%.

Of 350 students eligible to return to MCA, 263 have completed an Intent to Re-enroll form. This is an 83.8% Intent to Return Rate, exceeding the target of 50%



Post-Secondary Readiness:

Targets:

- Senior graduation rate of 70% increasing 5 points in every year getting to 90% in year 5
- Explore possibility of dual enrollment courses
- ACT, SAT, Accuplacer, and other tests to be determined
- 30% of graduates enrolled in a post-secondary institution, college, trade, and apprenticeship by February of year 1 after graduation.
- 10% of graduates not enrolled in post-secondary institutions but employed full time or enlisted in the military by February of year 1 after graduation.

MCA met its target for graduation. MCA had a 2016 Graduation Rate 90.2% (graduated 37 out of 41). Three of the graduating students graduated early (7.3%, 3 out of 41).

MCA did not graduate four out of 41 seniors. At the time of enrollment at MCA, three of the four students were not expected to graduate in June 2016 because they had significant credit deficiencies. Those students are on a June 2017 graduation track. One student was expected to graduate in June of 2016, but was truant off and on all year. This student has signed up for MCA's summer session credit recovery.

2016 Graduate Plans



During the 2015-16 school year 20% of MCA's juniors and seniors earned Dual-Enrollment College Credit (18 out of 88). This is a 16.2% increase from 14-15 to 15-16. MCA believes that the increase is due to its Partnership with University of Maine at Fort Kent and the increased "advertising" of the Dual-Enrollment opportunities via Homeroom Connection Calls and February School Counseling Live Lessons.

MCA's class of 2015 has 50% confirmed to be enrolled in a 4-year post-secondary institution or enlisted in the military. The class of 2016 has 48% enrolled in 2-4 year post-secondary institutions, 24% in 2-year institutions and 24% in 4-year institutions. 16% of 2016 graduates are pursuing vocational training. MCA met its targets for Post-Secondary Readiness.

Section 5: Governance

Targets

- Monthly Governance Board Meetings
- Bylaws and policies in application regularly reviewed

Chair of the Board	Amy Linscott
Board Member	Julie Hannon
Board Member	Carol Weston
Board Member	Amy Volk
Board Member	Nick McGee

MCA's Governing Board is made of 5 founding members. The Board reports it would like to add two additional members in the coming months.

In accordance with the school's charter application and applicable Maine laws, the Board meets at least eight times per year, but meets more often if needed. The regular MCA Board meetings are typically held at the local MCA office in South Portland according to the schedule that is set by the Board at its Annual Meeting each year. The Board currently meets the first Friday of the month. The agenda for regular meetings are posted on the school's website and at the location of the meeting. The public may directly address the Board at meetings, and members of the public, including parents, are also able to attend Board meetings via teleconference upon request. Approved meeting minutes are posted to the school Board's website shortly after the Board has approved them.

Governance and policies are reviewed on an ongoing basis and revisions to current policies and procedures, or implementation of new policies and procedures, are considered as needed. The school's Bylaws and Conflict of Interest policy are two of the items that the Board reviews annually.

Section 6: Administration

Interim Head of School	Doug Bourget
CFO	Heather Neal
Special Education Director	Patricia Joy

During the 2015-16 school year the Head of School took on a larger role in budget development. Next year, for school year 2016-17, the CFO's role will be in managing the budget and expenditures, a change from being more of a consultant as she had been during the 2015-16 school year. The Governing Board has described the school's CFO as an advocate and an asset to the school.

After the end of the 2015-16 school year, MCA proposed the addition of a Connections Education Special Education Director. This proposal was received by the MCSC and approved for the coming 2016-17 school year.

At the end of the 2015-16 school year MCA's Head of School resigned to take a position in a local school district, leaving a vacancy to be filled. MCA's Board moved quickly in posting the position and hiring a two year MCA teacher as Interim Head of School until a suitable candidate is found.

Section 7: School Climate

Targets:

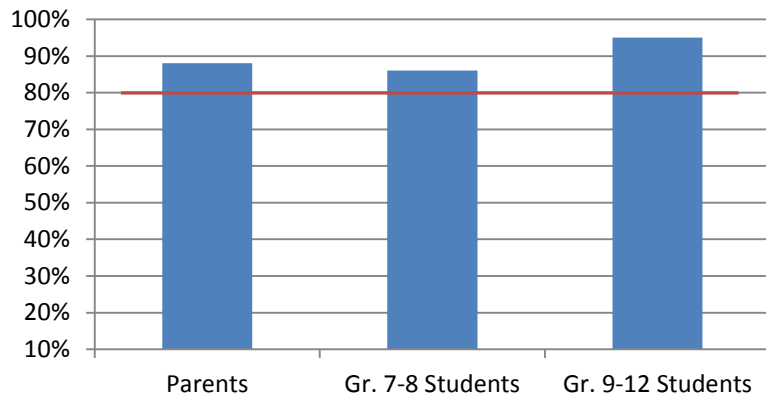
- Instances of bullying, harassment or other abusive behavior
- 80% of parents, staff, and students will express satisfaction on a confidential survey regarding social and academic climate
- Emotional and social growth of students

Performance:

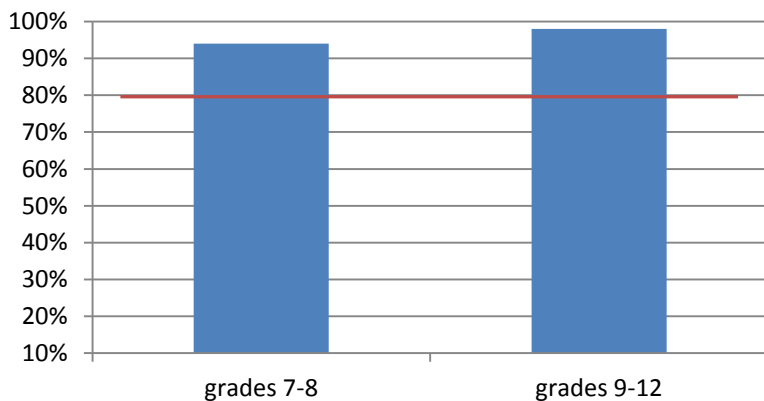
During the 2015-16 school year there was one instance of abusive behavior reported. While providing services at an MCA student's home, a Connections Education contracted social worker was hit in the face by an MCA student. The incident was discussed with the social worker, parent, student and Connections Education legal consultant. The student was suspended and the social worker has since reintegrated back into the student's home.

MCA conducted a 2015-2016 survey of parents and students. 88% of parents gave the school an A or a B on the 2015-16 Parent Satisfaction Survey. 86% of students in grades 7-8 and 95% of students in grades 9-12 gave the school an A or B on the 2015-16 Student Satisfaction Survey. MCA met the target of 80% satisfaction.

Percent of Population Rating MCA A or B



Satisfaction with MCA Program

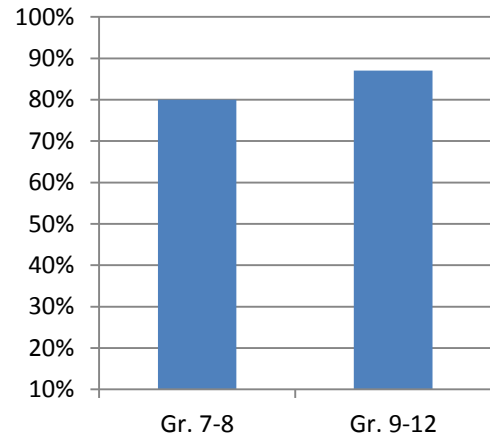


Also, on the same survey, 94% of students in grades 7-8 and 98% of students in grades 9-12 reported being satisfied with the Maine Connections Academy program. MCA met the target for 80% satisfaction.

One question on the Student Satisfaction Survey conducted by Connections Academy asked students how much they agree or disagree with the following statement about Maine Connections Academy – *My attitude toward learning has improved since starting with Maine Connections Academy.* At the 7th and 8th grade level, 80% of students agreed with this statement; 87% of students at the 9th-12th grade level agreed.

The survey conducted by the Maine Charter School Commission showed similar positive emotional and social growth of MCA students. In the areas of Grit, School Climate, School Engagement, School Rigorous Expectations, School Safety and School Teacher-Student Relationships, MCA students responded more favorably than the MCSC average.

My attitude toward learning has improved

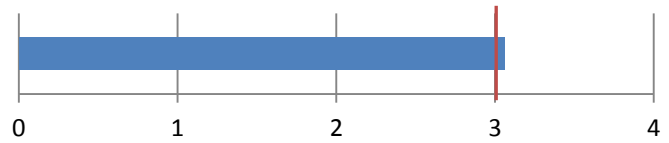


MCA has offered many opportunities for student engagement. During the 2015-16 school year MCA provided many in person events for students, teachers and families to interact with each other. MCA has a field trip coordinator and is supported by parent Community Coordinators from around the state of Maine. The Community Coordinators plan local activities in their region to allow students from the entire state of Maine to participate.

- MCA 2015-16 Field Trips:
- Abbe Museum, Bar Harbor, ME: Native American Studies / Arts Exhibit
- Birdsacres, Ellsworth, ME: trail clean up, owl presentation (National Honor Society Service Project)
- Pineland Farms, New Gloucester, ME: tour of several barns of cows in various stages of development; cheese-making facility
- Hermon Mountain, Hermon, ME: tubing for physical activity and meeting classmates
- Haven’s Candies, Westbrook, ME: factory tour and free samples
- Challenger Space Center Presentation by Maine Astronaut / UMO Campus, Orono, ME
- Portland Science Center, Portland, ME: 3-D Exhibit of bodies in motion
- Penobscot Theater, Bangor, ME: stage presentation of “It’s a Wonderful Life” and theatre tour including costume room
- Festival of Fostering Trees, York, ME: decorating an MCA School themed holiday tree for auctioning to benefit foster children program
- Malcolm Science Center Planetarium, Easton, ME: planet presentation with focus on Mars
- Southworth Planetarium, Portland, ME: presentation called, “8 Planets and Counting”
- Bradbury Mountain, Pownal, ME: state park hike
- Fort Knox, Prospect, ME: guided tour of fort; observatory
- Laudholm Farm, Wells, ME: Microscopic Marvels – gathering microscopic lifeforms from tidal pools to examine under microscope
- Treworgy Farms, Levant, ME: learn about farm life
- Common Ground Fair, Unity, ME: info about farming, sustainable living, woodworking
- Maine State Museum, Augusta, ME: Bug Maine-ia / Preserved and live bugs to view and touch

MCA conducted a staff survey during the 2015-16 school year. Teachers rated overall satisfaction working for MCA 3.06 out of 4.0. MCA met its target for staff satisfaction of 3.0 or higher.

Staff Overall Satisfaction



Section 8: Parent and Community Engagement

Targets:

- A plan for Parent Conferences established
- Capture data to show percent of logged contact between learning coaches and teachers
- Establish 3 Partnerships in year 1

Performance:

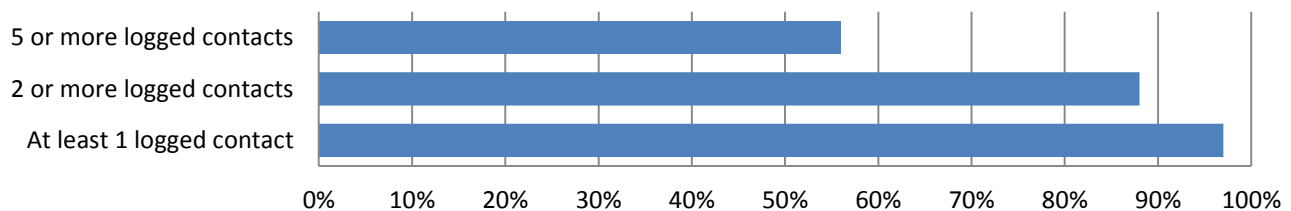
After the initial PLP conference at the beginning of the year, teachers had, at minimum, bi-weekly phone calls scheduled with families. Additional conferences were scheduled as needed. There were also conferences at the end of the year for course placement purposes. Other conferences included the School-wide Title I meeting & the School-wide State testing meeting. MCA met its target of establishing a plan for Parent Conferences.

Banner messaging, school newsletters and informational WebMails on notifications and events are other forms of parent communication utilized by the school.

Communication records are maintained through the Student Log system. 94% of students have at least 1 logged contact between the Learning Coach and teacher. MCA met its goal of capturing logged contact data.

- 76% of students have their Learning Coach contacts met (up 7% from 69% last school year)
- 97% of students have at least 1 logged contact between Learning Coach and teacher (up 3% from 94% last school year)
- 88% of students have at least 2 logged contacts between Learning Coach and teacher (up 4% from 84% last school year)
- 56% of students have 5 or more logged contacts between Learning Coach and teacher (up from 48% last school year)

Logged Contact Between Learning Coach and Teacher



During the 2015-16 school year MCA continued with previously established partners and developed new partnerships.

Educational partnerships include:

- University of Maine Fort Kent (for dual enrollment)
- University of Maine system (for state assessment administration)
- Maine Principal's Association
- Portland Regional Chamber of Commerce
- Mitchell Institute (student scholarship, networking and leadership organization)

These educational partnerships meet the target of maintaining three partnerships and establishing at least one new partnership.

Section 9: Finances

Targets:

- Monthly Financial Reports
- Target of plus or minus 10% variation between budget and actual revenue and expenditures

Performance:

MCA's Governing Board was updated on a monthly basis with a complete set of financial reports including balance sheet, actual to budget updates, bank reconciliations, and year end projections. The Board Treasurer continued to work with the Head of School and CFO to make sure the school is operating under sound financial practices. The Head of School and CFO took on more fiscal responsibility regarding the daily management of the budget and operation of the school, and the governing board continued to vote monthly to authorize payment of expenses, thus offering another layer of protection and continued oversight.

MCA ended FY16 with a fund balance of approximately \$60,000, more than \$45,000 under budget. MCA attributes this to a result of identifying cost savings, working in partnership with the ESP (Connections Education), utilizing staff effectively, and an increase in enrollment. MCA worked diligently after year one to put together a more precise budget without sacrificing programs and content. MCA plans to use the fund balance to pay off the outstanding debt with Connections Education a year early and build reserves. Since year one MCA has better anticipated costs so as to develop a more precise budget without sacrificing programs.

Section 10: Facilities & Maintenance and Transportation

Targets:

- Adequacy of Facilities Maintenance in Support of the Program
- Adequacy of Transportation in Support of the Program

Performance:

During the 2016-16 school year MCA office space operated at full capacity. MCA is considering multiple shifts for teachers in order to accommodate for more teaching spaces if needed.

MCA has been cleaned on a weekly basis, and there is consideration for an increase to having the office cleaned two days a week.

The only facility issue that occurred during the school year was a water leak. When there was heavy rain and strong winds some water was pushed under the door and left a small area of wet carpet. Work has been done to correct the problem.

During the 2015-16 school year MCA did not have to provide any transportation for students. When transportation was a challenge for students, MCA sent a teacher to the student's home to facilitate testing. Transportation fees were incurred transporting teachers to facilitation of state wide assessments and student activities.

Section 11: Evidence of Mission and Vision Implementation

Mission

The mission of MCA is to help each student maximize his or her potential and meet the highest performance standards through a uniquely individualized learning program in grades 7-12 throughout the state of Maine for students who need an alternative to the traditional classroom.

Vision

The vision of MCA will be to reach students for whom a cutting-edge virtual approach provides the very best pathway to school success through a uniquely individualized learning program that combines the best in virtual education with very real connections among students, family, teachers, and the community to promote academic and emotional success for every learner. By providing success for students who may otherwise have been unsuccessful in their educational goals, MCA increases the number of students who have a strong academic foundation and a love of learning.

MCA dedicated a portion of teacher workshop professional development time to the school's Mission and Vision. MCA school board members discussed the specific content language within the Mission and Vision statements and also gave their founding perspective on MCA. Following this discussion, MCA teachers started the process of identifying school level *Commitment Statements* that are aligned with the school's Mission and Vision to guide daily practice and decision making.

Section 12: Commendations and Recommendations

Commendations

- The review team found effective management of MCA by the Board and administration.
- Teachers exhibit considerable commitment to the school.
- In its second year, the school's overall student performance data showed improvement in most areas. At the same time, the school has ear marked areas for examination, mainly the Scantron scores in math and reading.
- A positive school climate has been created, as noted by the survey responses of students, parents and staff.

- There is serious attention given to the school's mission and vision, as evidenced by the staff's interest in writing a statement of commitment to it.
- Positive partnerships with other organizations have been developed in a short period of time including, but not limited to, those with the Mitchell institute, the University of Maine at Fort Kent and the Portland Chamber of Commerce. These have enhanced the school's effectiveness.

Recommendations

- Grades 9-12 Scantron scores showed a significant drop from 2014-15 to 2015-16 in the percent of students showing growth in reading (92% to 59%). MCA should consider further evaluating the Scantron data by grade level to develop appropriate interventions.
- MCA agrees that a more proactive approach to the on-boarding of students new to the school should positively affect those students' ability to adapt to its program, virtual environment, and overall expectations
- MCA should continue to explore better ways to engage learning coaches as critical partners, especially at the middle school level.
- MCA should continue to explore approaches to limit truancy.
- MCA should continue to explore options to increase SAT participation.
- MCA should continue to encourage student participation in field trip opportunities.
- In a virtual environment where teacher/student contact is largely online, it is recommended that teachers explore creative ways to increase contact time.
- MCA's administration expressed concern regarding attracting and retaining quality staff. MCA teachers are encouraged to provide administration with a list of professional benefits that accrue from teaching in a virtual environment.