

# STRATEGIC PLAN

2021 - 2024

## BACKGROUND

In January 2021, the Maine Charter School Commission hired a new Executive Director. The state had recently instituted a cap on the number of charter schools that could be authorized by the Charter Commission. It was clear that the state of chartering new schools in Maine was in question, which created an opportunity to reflect on the last ten years of the Commission's existence and what the next ten years might have in store.

This strategic plan was developed over the course of several months, with feedback and input from myriad stakeholders. We incorporated the voices of local and national experts in authorizing, innovation, and educational leadership. We engaged our charter operators, the six\* volunteer Commission members, and our partners in the work to explore the following questions:

- Why do we exist and what do we believe our role is to improve educational outcomes and enhance the quality of life in Maine?
- Where are we now, both as a Commission and as a state in terms of educational innovation and improvement?
- Where are we going both as a Commission and as a state?
- How will we get there and how will we know if we have arrived?
- What are we already good at and where do we need to improve?

## THE CHALLENGE

*It is clear that students are not being served at a level that improves freedom and quality of life* According to Educate Maine, 52% of 4th graders are proficient in reading and 41% of them are proficient in math.<sup>1</sup> In 8th grade, a pivotal year that determines a child's high school and post secondary trajectory, only 36% of students are proficient in mathematics. Children growing up in poverty are 90% more likely to leave formal education prior to high school graduation. At the same time, the "on-time" graduation rate for students in Maine is 87%, while reading proficiency among high school students is at 56% and math proficiency is just 33%, indicating that Maine's high schools are lowering the bar for achievement to allow students to graduate, setting them up for failure in post-secondary credentialing opportunities and decreased well-being throughout their lifetimes.

**We must act boldly and courageously to create thriving and diverse ecosystems of schools that support the achievement of ALL students in Maine. Maine's charter schools can be leaders in the effort to innovate and drastically improve student achievement, quality of life, and self-actualization.**

## MISSION, VISION, VALUES



### Vision

All of Maine's children will have access to a vibrant ecosystem of diverse schools so that all of them can become happy, healthy and thriving citizens



### Mission

To authorize, monitor and develop unique public charter schools that provide a dynamic, superlative education for every student

## Title 20-A Education § 2402 [\(LINK\)](#)

- Improve pupil learning by creating more high-quality schools with high standards for pupil performance
- Close achievement gaps between high-performing and low-performing groups of public school students
- Increase high-quality educational opportunities within the public education system
- Provide alternative learning environments for students who are not thriving in traditional school settings
- Create new professional opportunities for teachers and other school personnel
- Encourage the use of different, high-quality models of teaching and other aspects of schooling
- Provide students, parents, community members, and local entities with expanded opportunities for involvement in the public education system

## Values



### STUDENTS AT THE CENTER

Be aggressively urgent in pursuit of more effective schools



### COLLECTIVE IMPACT

Compassionately coordinate, collaborate and build trust to multiply the impact in the ecosystem



### DEVELOP THE PEOPLE

Design and implement tools, systems and cultures that grow the capacity of people doing the work so they are prepared for greatness



### TRANSPARENCY FOR THE SAKE OF CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Leverage available data and find new forms of measurement to cultivate truth in decision making and promote integrity in our processes and reporting

## KEY LEVERS

Embarking on systemic and structural change requires an analysis of how an organization can create pressure on the system to manifest the change it seeks. This requires an understanding of the organization's role and the tools it has at its disposal to create a new reality. The Maine Charter School Commission has several "levers" that it can deploy to create change. These levers are like dials on a complex machine. Turning one up while simultaneously turning another down can create a dramatic change to the end product and for the end-user. Knowing how much to turn these dials to get just the right outcome is an obvious challenge and should be taken seriously. Nevertheless, we need to explore adjusting the inputs so that we achieve new and better outcomes for our students. The following are the tools that the Commission has at its disposal to enhance outcomes for students and families:



**Contracts between charter boards and the Charter Commission** allow us to set expectations for performance and leverage legal tools to enforce a shared covenant.



**The Performance Framework** provides details on how each charter operator is making progress toward a high bar for performance on multiple domains ranging from student achievement to financial health.



**Reporting systems** allow the Charter Commission to publicly share the overall health and performance of the charter school program in Maine, providing much needed transparency and context for school quality.



**Service and authorizing fees** ensure that the Charter Commission has the necessary resources to support the monitoring of charter schools and provide services to each operator.



**Access to MDOE and other state level actors** positions the Charter Commission as a state-wide leader in the movement to increase achievement and well-being of students. Being a quasi-state agency, we have the ability to coordinate and communicate with other state leaders.



**The power to convene and network** provides the charter operators an organizing principle for collaboration and connects organizations with shared interests to solve complex problems.

## STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

The strategic priorities represent the focus of our daily work. From how we organize our time to how we build agendas for meetings, the strategic priorities allow us to boost the signal and reduce the noise. They provide us with an opportunity to make thoughtful decisions about what is important, what isn't, and the rationale that shaped our thinking.



Increase student achievement and social-emotional well-being



Create the conditions for sustained excellence



Develop effective governing boards



Foster collaborative innovation



Engage and activate stakeholders

### Strategic Priority #1: Increase student achievement and social-emotional well-being

*Develop compassionate, self-actualized, and engaged citizens who live with choice and purpose*

We exist to authorize and monitor unique schools that support the achievement and social mobility of children in Maine. Our first priority focuses on student achievement and social-emotional well-being because we believe the purpose of school is to help students understand the world around them and the world within them.

This priority will be driven by the following actions:

- > **Cultivate a culture of data-driven decision making** at all 10 charter schools and at the Commission. In doing so, we shift our culture away from leaving learning to chance to one in which we deeply understand how our inputs alter the outcomes.
- > **Develop school leaders** through professional learning, networking, and collective problem solving to maximize efforts toward achieving missions. The Charter Commission has the ability to connect our school leaders in a meaningful way so that they can solve shared problems in collaborative ways. We can also use our national reach to connect school leaders to development opportunities that can support their schools' missions. This supports school leaders in taking healthy risks and creating innovations that are supported by their peers.

> **Refine expectations through thoughtful revision and implementation of the Performance Framework** that includes multiple measures of authentic achievement, revealing the superpowers of our students and orienting priorities around educational practices that matter most.

> **Clarify the roles and relationship between operators and the Charter Commission** so that we share expectations about how the Charter Commission holds charter schools accountable for performance.

## **Strategic Priority #2: Create the conditions for sustained excellence**

*Champion policies and practices that nurture the ecosystem of effective and diverse schools*

In order to continue the important work already started, the Commission seeks to create and nurture the conditions for sustained growth and excellence over time. A positive consequence of paying attention to the conditions that generate success is that we create an environment where schools can be successful independent of the Commission.

This priority will be driven by the following actions:

> **Serve as a model, high-performing governing board** with procedures for evaluating its own performance and the ability to improve.

> **Work alongside policymakers to support policies and practices that increase school quality and choice** regardless of the type of school. Additionally, we will **issue an annual Legislative Impact Report** that assesses the consequences of policies on charter schools.

> **Seek opportunities to build coalitions** around shared goals.

> **Coordinate common efforts** to increase equity, innovation, and capacity building with our partners at the Maine Department of Education.

## **Strategic Priority #3: Develop effective governing boards**

*Develop self-sustaining, effective, autonomous governing boards*

The strength and performance of governing boards will determine the long-term success of the organization. At the core, the governing board's role is to ensure that the organization is financially healthy and it is holding the officers of the school accountable for the safety and achievement of its students. Charter school governing boards protect the sanctity of the school's mission and vision. In developing the boards, we better position the organization to mitigate liability, generate strong practices and policies that ensure success, and plan for sustained excellence.

This priority will be driven by the following actions:

> **Define expectations for interactions** between governing boards and the Charter Commission and initiate quarterly board president meetings with the Executive Director with an emphasis on financial planning, assessments of school leader performance and board performance reflection.

> **Develop and deliver a robust board training curriculum** that includes annual board training, new board member orientation, and board president training in coordination with national experts and partners.

> **Create and distribute exemplar, externally vetted documents** and policies, including agenda templates, calendars, etc.

> **Develop resources and tools that support board member recruitment**, selection and retention.

#### **Strategic Priority #4: Foster collaborative innovation**

*Model continuous improvement and innovative educational delivery*

The Commission has an opportunity to provide a catalyst to changes in the field, ultimately affecting student achievement and well-being. Through networking experts, providing opportunities for knowledge-building and convening leaders to problem-solve on shared challenges, the Commission can multiply the positive impact on communities through collaboration.

This priority will be driven by the following actions:

> **Build a list of state and national partners that can support innovative school practices** and connect charter schools with experts to facilitate implementation.

> **Investigate funding sources that support educational innovation in rural settings** including rural schools grants through the USDOE and other rural schools programs and foundations.

> **Deepen collaboration with organizations that share similar visions** to launch initiatives that support innovative teaching and learning practices.

> **Design thoughtful ways to enhance the capacity of teachers to deliver effective instruction** to their students, improving student achievement and well-being.

> **Spread best practices through monthly leader meetings** with charter school leaders and begin quarterly meetings with board chairs.

#### **Strategic Priority #5: Engage and activate stakeholders**

*Poke the campfire to ensure the public is knowledgeable about how charter schools contribute to a vibrant, thriving ecosystem of schools*

A significant opportunity for the charter school program in Maine is making sure that we are engaging our stakeholders and audience in a conversation about the value proposition that charter schools provide. When

we effectively communicate with and on behalf of our communities, we strengthen the culture of charter schools, reduce misconceptions and replace them with honest information, and create feedback loops to continue the progress and growth of the state's charter school program.

This priority will be driven by the following actions:

- > **Engage, inspire and activate our communities through vibrant storytelling** in multiple media and on myriad platforms that reveals the power and promise of charter schools.
  
- > **Execute thoughtful and truthful reporting of charter school performance** at a regular cadence so that our community can be aware of the progress charter schools are making.
  
- > **Set the table for parents to promote the value of a charter school education** and empower them to speak on behalf of their schools.
  
- > **Support full enrollment at charter schools** by better understanding the market conditions, demand, and available seats.
  
- > **Position charter schools as great places to work** by branding for high-achieving, creative educators.