**Report on Start-Up Plan and Pre-Opening Requirements**

**Ecology Learning Center**

**August 11, 2020**

On July 29, 2020, the Maine Charter School Commission (MCSC) Review Team met via Zoom with members of the Ecology Learning Center’s governing board and its Head of School to review the school’s Start-up Plan and Pre-opening requirements.

The school has substantially met its Start-Up Plan and Pre-Opening Requirements.

MCSC staff have provided the school with a detailed spreadsheet that includes each task with its completion or pending status, along with resources for support. Staff will continue to work with the school to ensure all elements are completed.

Ecology Learning Center:

Robin Chernow, Board Chair

Solomon Heifets

Michelle Boyle

Leon Garnett

Anne-Marie Adamson

Lēza Packard, Head of School

MCSC:

Shelley Reed, Commission Liaison

Bob Kautz, Executive Director

Gina Post, Director of Program Management

Dr. Roberta Lucas, Maine DOE Special Services

Collette Sullivan, Maine DOE Special Services

Dr. Joe Mattos, Consultant

Joe Drago, CPA, Consultant

**Students, Enrollment, and Admissions**

The Ecology Learning Center board has the policies that were submitted with its application and has since approved 73 additional policies, including enrollment policies.

The school will be using Infinite Campus (as an add on through an agreement with Community Regional Charter School) as its Student Information System (SIS).

An admissions lottery was not needed. A waitlist is being maintained on a Google form and is timestamped for maintaining order of Intent to Enroll receipt.

Student Recruitment:

* + The school has held six open houses for students which included at least one faculty member (capped at eight students per open house). Students gathered outside the building at 4:30, went inside with masks on, came outside and removed masks for a walk to park for outdoor activities.
  + The school has held two Community Open Houses.

42 students were enrolled as of 7/30/2020, and three students were partially through the enrollment process. The target of 90% of student enrollment within 30 days of school opening has been met.

**Governance**

As was provided in the charter application, the organization is incorporated as a non-profit and has secured federal tax-exempt status.

The board has access to the school’s bylaws in a shared folder. There are currently board members holding officer positions of president, secretary and treasurer. The school will review its bylaws to confirm whether it needs a vice-president.

The school will submit its updated board roster (with officer designations) and an updated organizational chart via Epicenter in an upcoming task.

The board has continued to meet regularly and has kept and approved minutes, which will be posted to the school’s website.

The school believes it has adopted all required policies. Policies were discussed at the meeting and an updated list will be sent to the Ecology Learning Center’s board for cross referencing. The school will be required to post its policies on its school website.

All board members attended or watched the MCSC sponsored AirWin Education trainings this spring. The board has a few more trainings to complete (e.g., FOA training).

**Educational Program**

School calendar is final and is on the school’s website. It aligns with RSU 3, which is the local district, and the area CTE center.

**Administration and Staff**

Administrative/leadership roles:

* Head of School has been hired.
* Dean of Students/Guidance Counselor has been hired.
  + This was originally a half time position but is now full time due to need. This created a budget issue, as it was budgeted for half time.
* Special Education Director plans to be contracted with RSU 3 (No MOU yet.)

Support Staff

* Community Regional Charter School has been hired for “back office” services
* Nurse plans to be contracted with RSU 3 (No MOU yet.)
* Looking for a secretary/receptionist
* The school does not have janitorial services in the budget, as it wants students to be a part of keeping their school clean. There was a discussion about requirements of trainings for janitorial duties and for cleaning during COVID.
* The school has not hired a special educator yet. It is waiting to see how many students currently have an IEP.

Criminal History Record Check Approvals will be completed through MDOE for all school staff and volunteers. It is written into the staff agreements. It is understood that if they don’t have it done, they are not able to work.

The school is planning to work with the Maine Cohort for Customized Learning (MCCL), which will include a membership and access to professional development. The school has 10 PD days on the calendar. Staff begin on August 28th.

The Performance Evaluation and Professional Growth (PEPG) system not yet completed, as this is a staff driven activity and will be completed during the school’s first year.

A Board-approved handbook has been created, the board will check its minutes to verify its adoption by vote.

**Management Contract**

The school doesn’t have a management company but will supply MCSC with copies of any MOUs.

**Budget**

The board has an approved budget for this school year but has not yet created a 5-year budget.

The school has a detailed monthly cash-flow projection for first year of operation.

**Financial Management**

The school received its first payment from the state of Maine, which didn’t include special education funding, and is a major budgetary concern for the school.

Board-approved fiscal controls policies and procedures?

* The board voted that the treasurer and Head of School can sign checks.
* CRCS will be paying invoices, etc.
* An accounting system will be included in the agreement with CRCS.
* The school was encouraged by MCSC to work with a CPA now for guidance, rather than waiting for its first annual financial audit.

**Facility**

The school will close on the facility on either August 14th or 17th. It has been able to use the facility during the past weeks for open houses, inspections, etc.

The facility has been officially approved by the planning board for k-12 use. An additional egress is required and is expected to be done by September 1st. Wentworth Partners will ensure the school receives a Certificate of Occupancy. A permanent Certificate of Occupancy might not be issued until stairs are complete, in which case the school anticipates a temporary Certificate of Occupancy and will be communicating with MCSC. The school was encouraged by MCSC to have a back-up plan.

The August 15, 2020 goal for $100,000 was met.

An Emergency Plan was drafted with Wentworth Partners. MCSC encouraged the school to contact MDOE for additional support and resources.

Testing of drinking and cooking water fixtures, interior water lines, and exterior water lines has been completed. The school reported some work needs to be done (filters).

Fire and asbestos inspections, lead paint and PCBs (Polychlorinated biphenyls) assessments have not yet been completed.

Office and classroom equipment, furnishings and fixtures and installation will be done after August 17th (closing on facility). The school reports it has been stockpiling equipment, furnishings and fixtures from donations.

**Transportation**

The school will be contracting transportation services with RSU 3 and is in the process of finalizing an MOU.

**Food Service**

The school is in talks with to a culinary instructor so students can be involved in making meals. The current issue is finding a facility/kitchen to produce the meals. The school is considering other options as well.

**Insurance**

The school is working with Keyes Insurance. The school was reminded that insurance requirements are in Exhibit B of charter contract. Health Insurance is in process.

**Additional Topic: Opening a school during a pandemic**

The school will be using 5 instructional spaces for social distancing. Three of them are large; one is large, but not quite as big.

Students and teachers will spend time outdoors at the park across the street.

Students and teachers/staff will wear PPE as required.

During the meeting the various COVID related funding opportunities were discussed.

The school’s current plan is to have school start with all students in the building.

The school does not yet have a remote/hybrid learning plan and will be talking about this at an upcoming board meeting.