

Annual Monitoring Report

SY2024-25



November 2025

Ecology Learning Center

Board President: Josh Kercsmar

Head of School: Leza Packard

NARRATIVE

Ecology Learning Center, located in Unity, is in its sixth year of operation and serves 120 students from 33 cities and towns in the surrounding area.

26.67% of ELC students have an IEP and 35.83% are economically disadvantaged - both higher than statewide averages.

High-level takeaways from SY2024-25:

Strengths:

- Reading Proficiency
- College Readiness
- Graduation
- Student Attendance
- School culture and climate
- Passion Projects
- A strong, active, and engaged governing board who meet regularly

Areas of Focus:

- Math Proficiency

Student Achievement

ELC administers the Maine Through Year Assessment to assess reading and math proficiency of students in Grade 10. ELC is meeting framework expectations in reading, and approaching expectations in math - both slightly lower than a year ago. Reportable subgroups are also performing slightly lower than last year and should be a focus for the school in the upcoming school year.

The school uses the Accuplacer to measure college-readiness and is meeting framework expectations for both reading and math benchmarks. It is important to note that all subgroups, with the exception of students with IEPs, are exceeding framework expectations.

Chronic absenteeism is a highlight for the school this year, with only 14.95% of students considered chronically absent, a huge improvement from 25.93% a year ago. Most of ELC's students reside in Waldo County where the chronic absenteeism rate is approximately 31%.

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ELC reports that 100% of its 4 and 5-year students graduated this year, exceeding the state average and the annual goals defined by the Maine Department of Education.

100% of ELC seniors successfully participate in at least one post-secondary activity, and the school supports students and families with completion of the FAFSA as needed.

School Climate and Family Engagement

The Maine Charter School Commission requires that schools administer the Panorama school climate surveys annually. ELC's results across all stakeholder groups remain strong, with all exceeding framework expectations this year. We note the dedicated effort made by ELC to ensure that required participation thresholds were met this year.

Organizational Sustainability

The ELC governing board is an active board, holding regular meetings throughout the school year. In addition to holding an annual retreat, board members met all of the required board training requirements - exceeding expectations on the performance framework.

We encourage the board to continue to focus on the "timely posting" of board meeting agendas and approved meeting minutes as this is an area of the framework that is approaching expectations.

Another area of focus should be on consistent timeliness of required reports that are submitted to the Commission.

Financial Management and Viability

Based on FY25 4th quarter financials, ELC falls in the low to moderate risk on all financial metrics with the exception of the two-year cash flow, which the board continues to closely review. During the year, the school found the cost of running the newly acquired Clifford Arts & Student Center was higher than anticipated while expected revenues were lower. The board has identified the creation of a strategic business plan for the facility as a key priority along with additional fundraising activities. ELC engaged the services of PGM Accounting and received a clean financial audit for FY24.

School Mission and Student Persistence

Student persistence remains a strength for the school with 88% of students persisting throughout the school year and 97% submitting an intent to re-enroll for the upcoming school year.

PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK OUTCOMES

Exceeding	Meeting	Approaching	Not Meeting
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Student Achievement

Proficiency	
Maine Through Year Assessment (ELA) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grade 10 - 58% of <i>ELC high school students are “at or above state expectations” compared to 59% statewide per the Acacia platform</i> 	Meeting Between $\geq-5\%$ and $<5\%$ of state average of schools “at or above expectations”
Maine Through Year Assessment (Math) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grade 10 - 42% of <i>ELC high school students are “at or above state expectations” compared to 49% statewide per the Acacia platform</i> 	Approaching Between $\geq-15\%$ and $<-5\%$ of state average of schools “at or above expectations”
Maine Through Year Assessment – Subgroups (ELA) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Female (Approaching) 	Approaching Between $\geq-15\%$ and $<-5\%$ of state average of schools “at or above expectations”
Maine Through Year Assessment – Subgroups (Math) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Female (Approaching) 	Approaching Between $\geq-15\%$ and $<-5\%$ of state average of schools “at or above expectations”
Graduation	
4-Year High School Graduation Rate - <i>School reports 100%</i>	Exceeding
5-Year High School Graduation Rate - <i>School reports 100%</i>	Exceeding
6-Year High School Graduation Rate	<i>Not Applicable</i>
Post-Secondary Readiness	

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<u>Accuplacer</u> - 78% of students are meeting the college readiness indicator of 239 or above in Reading; 75% of students are meeting the college readiness indicator of 226 or above in Math	Meeting
Accuplacer - Subgroups <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students with IEPS (Not Meeting) Economically Disadvantaged (Exceeding) Students with a 504 Plan (Exceeding) Male (Exceeding) Female (Exceeding) 	Meeting 75%-85% of students are meeting or exceeding the goal in both math and reading
Post-Secondary Activity Participation - <i>School reports 100%</i>	Exceeding
FAFSA Support - <i>ELC provided support to 85% of families/students</i>	Reported as Required
Other	
Student Attendance/Chronic Absenteeism	14.95% - School Reported

School Climate and Family Engagement

Panorama School Climate Survey – Family Results <ul style="list-style-type: none"> School Climate - 99th Percentile Safety - 99th Percentile School Fit - 99th Percentile 	Exceeding 3 of the 3 required scales are 50% or higher when compared to like schools nationally
Panorama School Climate Survey – Student Results <ul style="list-style-type: none"> School Climate - 99th Percentile Safety - 99th Percentile Rigorous Expectations - 90th Percentile Teacher-Student Relationships - 99th Percentile 	Exceeding 4 of the 4 required scales are 50% or higher when compared to like schools nationally
Panorama School Climate Survey – Teacher Results <ul style="list-style-type: none"> School Climate - 99th Percentile Leadership - 90th Percentile Professional Learning - 80th Percentile Feedback and Coaching - 60th Percentile 	Exceeding 4 of the 4 required scales are 50% or higher when compared to like schools nationally
Panorama School Climate Survey – Staff Results <ul style="list-style-type: none"> School Climate - 99th Percentile 	Exceeding

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership - 99th Percentile • Professional Learning - 90th Percentile • Feedback and Coaching - 70th Percentile 	4 of the 4 required scales are 50% or higher when compared to like schools nationally
Panorama Survey Action Plan - <i>ELC developed + implemented plan</i>	Meeting

Organizational Sustainability

Governing Board Effectiveness	Low Risk
Board Meetings Held in Accordance with Bylaws and FOAA	Meeting - 14 Meetings Held
Timely Publication of Board Meeting Agendas and Approved Minutes	2 Agendas/0 Minutes
Reporting Accuracy and Timeliness - <i>79% on time; 98% accurate</i>	Approaching
Board Training - <i>13 requirements/13 completed (100%) + Annual Retreat</i>	Exceeding
Facility Meets Local and State Requirements	Meeting

Financial Management and Viability*

Near Term Measures	
Current Ratio	Moderate Risk
Unrestricted Days Cash on Hand - <i>30 Days Cash on Hand</i>	Moderate Risk
Enrollment Variance	Low Risk
Debt Default - <i>None</i>	Low Risk
Sustainability Measures	
Total 3-Year Margin	Moderate Risk
Debt to Asset Ratio	Low Risk
2-Year Cash Flow	High Risk
Financial Obligations	Low Risk
Other	
Financial Planning and Budgeting - <i>School submitted 3-Year Plan</i>	Meeting

*Based on FY25 QTR4 financials

School Mission and Student Persistence

Mission and Key Design Implementation	Meeting
Student Persistence: School Year - <i>106 of 120 Students (88%)</i>	Meeting
Student Persistence: Year-to-Year - <i>77 of 79 Students (97%)</i>	Exceeding

School Customization

Passion Projects - The intended outcome of week-long winter Passion Projects is to guide students to explore and develop an independent interest that will prepare them for future education and employment opportunities. Students will gain skills in project planning, completion, and presentation. They will strengthen skills in organization, public speaking, and self-reflection. The goal meets the school's mission by immersing students in an "authentic real-world learning" project of their choice, seeking "mentorship" and identifying a need or challenge in their community. We will measure our goal using a rubric and narrative reflection. The rubric will provide quantitative data by measuring four categories (planning, process, product, presentation). The narrative reflection will provide qualitative data by asking students to write about the quality of their work, how they would re-do or revise their project, and what they learned about themselves throughout the Passion Project.

Exceeding

With a goal of 95%, at least 65% of students will learn an overall score of 80%-100% on their week-long winter Passion Project.

SCHOOL WRITTEN ANNUAL SELF-ASSESSMENT

Academic Success

The mission of the Ecology Learning Center is to deeply root students in Maine's ecological & cultural landscapes, foster authentic real-world learning through mentorship & craft, and cultivate compassionate and resilient leaders prepared to engage in the challenges of today & tomorrow.

The vision for the Center is to inspire high school students from Waldo County and beyond to roll up their sleeves and engage in their local communities through service learning and apprenticeships. Guided by the unifying theme of "ecology" (the study of the relations between organisms and their environment), students will enact and embody ecological principles by making meaningful connections between school and community. The Center will help students develop the knowledge, skills, and commitment to work collaboratively to address important local challenges. Students will take active roles in every aspect of their education, with the support and guidance of teachers and local experts.

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Academic Program

On June 5, the Ecology Learning Center graduated its third and largest class of 28 students. Every graduation ceremony has uniquely reflected the school's mission, vision, and overall success. Held outside at MOFGA under a tent loaned by a local fire department and set up by parent and student volunteers, the ceremony began with live fiddle and guitar music performed by the younger sibling and parent of a student in the Bridge program. The "keynote" speeches delivered by all 28 seniors captivated the audience of over 300 family, friends, board and community members. A common theme in the speeches was gratitude for teachers, with messages that made the audience cry, laugh, and reflect deeply.

Following traditional awards for academic achievement and scholarships, the faculty presented "Mission" awards to students acknowledged for being an Environmental Leader, Community Leader, Hands-On Leader, Compassionate Leader, and Resilient Leader. It was so difficult for the staff to limit mission awards to just five students, they added two additional awards: Mentorship Leader and Creative Arts Leader. The graduation reflected every element of our school vision, from folk music and fresh food to student leadership and intergenerational community engagement.

This year the school grew from 107 students to 120. Of the 120 students enrolled during the 2025 academic year, 28 had IEPs and 18 had 504 plans. In order to accommodate the needs of these students, we had 3 full time Ed Techs and a part time special ed teacher. Feedback from parents of students with IEPs was once again very positive.

The addition of the Clifford Arts & Student Center greatly expanded the school's arts curriculum and sense of community. Courses in theater, filmmaking, and ceramics were introduced. A senior and alum collaborated to create an entirely student-led musical theater performance with sold-out performances. The Cliff's kitchen was certified in the fall to allow the nutrition staff and students chefs to prepare and serve lunch on site for the first time since the school opened. The visual, performing, and culinary arts at the new Arts & Student Center brought students, staff, and community closer together.

Assessment

Our test scores indicate that we are meeting our goal of 75% or above graduating students meeting benchmarks in one of the three established tests for math and reading: Accuplacer, SATs, or ASVABs. Students in subgroup categories (economically disadvantaged, 504 plans, and IEP) are demonstrating college readiness in reading.

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In the grade report data, 79% of ninth graders are low average and above in math and 91% of ninth graders are low average above in reading. In the MAP growth grade report, 78% of 10th graders were at or above low average in math and 100% of 10th graders were at or above low average in reading. In the Maine Through Year assessment, 42% of 10th graders were at or above state expectations in math and 58% of 10th graders were at or above state expectations in reading. In the grade report data, 88% of 11th graders were at or above low average in math and 96% of 11th graders were at or above low average in reading.

Compared to local catchment area testing data, the Ecology Learning Center had a higher test completion rate; 100% of our students were tested as a whole and in subgroup categories, while only 80% and 90% of students at two local districts were tested. When comparing AY24 test results with these two geographically closest districts, the Ecology Learning Center scored higher in both English Language Arts and Math. In ELA, 79.2% of our students scored at or above expectations as compared with 67% and 42.9% at the other schools. In Math, 44% of our students scored at or above expectations as compared with 37% and 31% at the other schools.

When comparing AY24 subgroup data, the Ecology Learning Center again scored higher than our two neighboring districts. In Math, 50% of our economically disadvantaged students scored at or above state expectations as compared with 26% and 34% of economically disadvantaged students from the other districts. In the sub category of special education only one comparison school had data to use. In ELA, 33% of our SpEd students scored at or above state expectations as compared with 22% of SpEd students from the neighboring district. In Math, 33% of our SpEd students scored at or above state expectations as compared with 18% of SpEd students from the neighboring district.

Climate and Discipline

As we grow, the Ecology Learning Center has been able to uphold the vision of our academic programming through block scheduling, the Work and Wellness Wednesday curriculum, internship program, Passion Projects, small class sizes, highly qualified and passionate educators, and deep connections with our community to foster place-based learning opportunities. Using state assessment data to understand deficits, we prioritize student growth and a community-wide growth mindset with shared leadership.

We consistently offer professional development in Restorative Justice practices. This year, we welcomed two extremely well-respected instructors instrumental in founding the Restorative Justice movement in Waldo County: Sarah Mattox in October to train our staff, and Margaret Micolichek in June to train our Board of Directors. As the staff continues to strengthen and expand their Restorative practices, the

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school celebrates few complaints, low violence, and an emphasis on students understanding how to identify and repair harm.

Results from the Panorama parent and student surveys affirm our positive school climate. Participation in the survey increased, from 44% to 58% participation by families and from 67% to 90% participation by students. Survey results were higher in almost every category this year. 87% of families and 71% of students have positive perceptions of the overall social and learning climate of the school, up 11% for students from last year. 92% of families and 79% of students have positive perceptions of physical and psychological safety at school, up 3% and 8% from last year, respectively.

Organizational Success

Calendar & Schedule

To support our partnership with RSU 3, we follow their school calendar. We published our AY2025-2026 calendar on our website after RSU 3 approved their calendar. Next year we will once again provide Remote Learning days on RSU 3's Early Release days. This eases transportation and more importantly, it gives our students and staff important practice for remote learning if we are forced to go remote without warning. We will begin school one day earlier than RSU 3 to accommodate our fall orientation trips.

We continued a weekly schedule that allowed for longer blocks, project-based learning, interdisciplinary work between departments, and more ease for students to advance to higher math levels. We reworked our Wednesday schedule once again to streamline and strengthen Career Readiness and Wellness courses, required for graduation.

Student Recruitment, Enrollment, Retention

Our enrollment goal for the year was 125 students (grades 9-12). Our student count on October 1, 2024 was 120 so we had to revise the budget. Enrollment on the last day of school was 108. We welcomed a record-high 9th grade class, and moreover a group of students who are the most closely aligned with the mission of any class thus far. The approved budget for FY26 is again 125 students. As of mid-June, 2025, we have 129 students enrolled for AY26. Our recruitment has been primarily word of mouth, flyers posted at public places, and social media.

Staffing and Human Resources

We have a consistently high staff return rate, with 23 out of 28 staff members returning. We are excited to welcome three new full time employees: a special education teacher, math teacher, and "magician" (split role as art teacher, ed tech, receptionist, and Clifford Arts & Student Center co-director). We are

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also adding new part time teachers in math, music, and theater. Our operations departments (transportation & nutrition) have stabilized, with a strong Operations Director hired last August. Our part-time registrar will continue as the registrar in AY26 with expanded hours to support office management and substitute teaching.

Governance Success

The board of directors is engaged and capable of ensuring that ELC meets its mission. We have a well-balanced board in terms of experience on this board, perspective, and expertise. The new members bring significant academic experience (decades teaching in colleges/universities). Board members are kind, caring, and hard working. They are willing to learn and grow as new challenges arise.

Current challenges the board faces are how to meet the school's financial needs, especially with ongoing facility costs of the Clifford Arts & Student Center. Several monthly board meetings focused on fundraising and the board chair leads a grant writing committee. Additionally, the board collaborated with the faculty for a half-day professional development session in March to address Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. The board attended a full day annual retreat on June 30 where they dedicated significant discussion time to fundraising.

The Directors are confident they have the capacity to lead and manage the school. Their practices are very open and transparent to the community. They continue to grow and learn, as evidenced by conducting a self assessment and discussing the results at the annual retreat, and by representing at the December and May professional development workshops offered by the Charter Commission. The Directors are currently seeking additional board members, as the numbers decreased in June from 8 to 6.

Financial Success

Following the May 2025 Treasury Report, financial metrics were acceptable. Revenue was below by \$154K and expenses below budget by \$101K, which resulted in financials falling \$53K net under budget. The school borrowed \$50K in an interest-free loan from the homeschool enrichment Bridge program in February and paid it back in full on June 30, 2025.

FY25 is the first year of five that a net loss is anticipated. From a profitability standpoint, the school's total equity is 1.4 million, mostly from acquisitions of the Clifford Arts & Student CEnter gift and profits from the past 4 years. Unrestricted net assets will go down but we will still have positive net assets.

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From a cash flow standpoint, revenues will better match expenses in FY26 due to the balanced timing of per pupil allocations throughout the whole year.

Facilities - Costs increased dramatically, due to unexpected repairs, maintenance and utility bills at the new Clifford Arts & Student Center. The Cliff Manager position (0.5 FTE) has been divided into a shared position between the returning manager and a new employee with complimentary skills and has applied for and received "StreetScape" funding from the town of Unity to address repairs needed to the porch and entranceway to the building.

Transportation - We stabilized costs with strong leadership from our new Director of Operations. Van routes were streamlined to save gas and driver time, and vehicles were carefully maintained to avoid purchasing an additional van. The two older 14-passenger buses were finally sold for \$6K each.

Fundraising plays a critical role in the school's fiscal operation. As we enter FY26, our primary goals are to meet our enrollment target of 125 and increase fundraising. We had another clean financial audit, this year with PGM Accounting and have scheduled the FY25 audit even earlier this year in July.