

Snow Pond Arts Academy
90 Day Visit Report
December 5, 2016

INTRODUCTION

The Maine Charter School Commission review team met with Snow Pond Arts Academy for its 90 day evaluation on December 5, 2016 at the school at 8 Goldenrod Lane, Sidney, Maine. The visiting team consisted of Maine Charter School Commission review team members John Bird, chair, Jana Lapoint, and Shelley Reed. Bob Kautz and Gina Post were also in attendance for the Commission. Roberta Lucas from the Department of Education was in attendance representing Special Services. Joseph Mattos, Interim Head of School, Koren Coughlin Interim Principal, and Governing Board members Julie Richard, Sherri Gilbert, and Janna Townsend were present to represent Snow Pond Arts Academy.

DISCUSSION WITH ADMINISTRATION AND BOARD

Prior to the visit, Snow Pond Arts Academy submitted the following documents to the Commission for review. These documents served as a guide for the discussion.

- Enrollment numbers, including demographic information
- Special Education count and Special education staffing
- Update on hiring of teachers and staff
- Success and Challenges in the school's opening and current operation
- Current Budget vs. Actual
- School's plan for gathering necessary documentation to report on Performance Measures

Meeting with Snow Pond Arts Academy Students

An informal meeting with seven Snow Pond Arts Academy Students described the school as a small school where everybody knows everybody. Students reported being very happy and comfortable at the school and said the school culture is very accepting of students' differences.

Student opinions of the virtual learning model used at the school varied greatly. While one student reported having gone from being a C-D student to an A-B student at Snow Pond Arts Academy because she learns better that way, another student reported finding the curriculum too fast and not allowing for mastery. This student said she had seen improvement in the pace of the coursework recently, but still didn't like it.

When asked how they felt about having arts classes in the morning and academic classes in the afternoon, students unanimously reported being happy with the schedule; finding that arts classes in the morning gets them excited to start the day.

Some things the students would like to see at Snow Pond Arts Academy include:

- more visual arts
- student choice with learning via K-12 on the computer or with a more teacher-centered approach
- putting on a production featuring the arts
- GSTA or Civil rights team
- SAT preparation

Enrollment numbers, including demographic information

There are currently 101 students enrolled at Snow Pond Arts Academy. Students come from local towns, and other towns over 40 miles away including Bath, Cape Elizabeth, Farmington, Greenville, and Portland. The enrollment by grade is as follows:

- 9 41
- 10 39
- 11 20

*One student had just enrolled and records had not yet been received from the sending district to inform what grade s/he is in.

Special Education count and Special Education staffing

Snow Pond Arts Academy hired one part-time special education teacher in October. A school psychologist was employed to test students and to coordinate special services at the school. At the time of the 90 day visit both the special education teacher and psychologist had given the school notice of their resignation. The school will be filling those vacancies. Snow Pond Arts Academy is also looking for an Ed. Tech. 3.

Because the school has had staffing difficulties, students requiring specially designed instruction have not received services and the school will need to offer compensatory services to students. It was recommended that Snow Pond Arts Academy send letters to parents immediately about the status of special education services not being provided to students and that compensatory services would be made available.

Update on hiring of teachers and staff

Snow Ponds Arts Academy staff have been hired for both the academic program and the arts program. The school reports that, while most teaching positions have been filled, several key administrative positions, such as Student Services Coordinator, Information Technology Director, and Special Education Coordinator are currently vacant. The school has plans to adopt a model of blended learning that is appropriate for Snow Ponds Arts Academy and all instruction will be based on that model.

Academic subject teachers were trained on the K-12 system and continue to refine the blended learning style of teaching. The school has identified this area as needing improvement and requiring more training. Teachers are also working to infuse the arts into academic classes. Snow Pond Arts Academy reports that both the blended learning of in-class and online learning and the infusion of arts into the academic subject areas has been a challenge.

Success and Challenges in the school's opening and current operation

Snow Pond Arts Academy reports some of its recent successes as:

- Programming – Snow Pond Arts Academy provides students with a comprehensive selection of course offerings and clubs and has recently revised its afternoon academic schedule to provide teachers with more time for teacher/student contact.
- Performance Showcases - Once a month, students in all academic areas have the opportunity to perform for the school community to demonstrate learning from their courses. Student performances rotate so that all students have an opportunity to participate. Families are welcomed to attend these events.

- Student Cabaret – Starting in December, Snow Pond Arts Academy will offer a student –led Cabaret for students wishing to perform contemporary pieces to their peers. Students are responsible for organizing, planning and running this coffee-house style venue.
- Enrollment – Snow Pond Arts Academy student enrollment has increased from 65 students registered in July to a current level of 101 students in grades 9, 10, and 11.
- Positive School Climate – Students and Snow Pond Arts Academy employees are dedicated to an Arts education, which is reflected in their commitment to their work and studies.
- Safe and Healthy School Environment –Nutritious meals and snacks are provided to students on a daily basis, and Snow Pond Arts Academy has worked closely with the Oakland Fire Department to create emergency plans and procedures to ensure student and staff safety.

Snow Pond Arts Academy reports some of its recent challenges as:

- Staffing - Staffing has been an ongoing challenge since the opening of school because of students' enrollment needs and employee resignations. Most teaching positions have been filled but several key administrative positions are currently vacant.
- Leadership –In respect to overseeing the operation of Snow Pond Arts Academy in both management and academic areas leadership in operating a public charter required more appropriate skills for that task. Factors contributing to this problem include not hiring a Head of School, an absence of job descriptions and job expectations, and an unclear Organizational Chart for managing Snow Pond Arts Academy. Steps are being taken to address these areas of concern. These include hiring qualified and experienced personnel for the positions of Head of School, Principal, and Operations Manager.
- Academic Programming – Snow Pond Arts Academy has encountered problems implementing a “blended learning” model. Factors contributing to this problem include a lack of training and experience in working with K-12 online courses and an unclear Snow Pond Arts Academy definition and description of “blended learning.”
- Academic and Arts Performance Measures – Performance Measure as identified in the Snow Pond Arts Academy Charter Contract have yet to be addressed. The NWEA is not currently being used to measure students' achievement in English. Plans are currently underway to create individual student Personal Learning Plans and performance assessments (with rubrics) for both Arts and Academics that provide accurate measures in determining students' proficiency in demonstrating important curriculum standards.

Current Budget vs. Actual

Snow Pond Arts Academy provided an updated “working” budget as well as Current vs. Actual. Snow Pond Arts Academy reported \$90,000 has been pledged or received from fundraising, and revised state subsidy revenues have been calculated into the budget. The bottom line shows a deficit of \$44,048. Any new salaries or unexpected expenses will increase this bottom line. The school is in the process of reconciling some specific payroll issues that have resulted from payroll overpayments since the beginning of the school year. The school has hired an experienced public school operations person to manage the finances of the school and address identified budget issues.

School's plan for gathering necessary documentation to report on Performance Measures

During the 2016-2017 school year Snow Ponds Arts Academy 11th grade students will participate in state testing.

The school has not begun using its school-selected assessment- NWEA Map Test. The other school-selected assessment, Personal Learning Plans, are currently being developed.

Student enrollment has fluctuated. Students who withdrew cited reasons such as the school was not a good fit and the use of K-12 technology.

The Governing Board holds regular meeting and posts the agenda on the school's website. The school received a letter from the Commission's Director of Project Management a week before this meeting pointing out that Board meeting minutes had not been posted to the website since before the opening of school. Minutes were posted within days, and assurances were given that, moving forward, minutes would be posted promptly after their approval. Board meetings are open to the public.

The facility was renovated prior to the start of school to provide year-round locations for academic and arts classes. Resident's housing is provided when needed for student attendance.

Transportation is offered to students in the catchment area. The transportation routes have undergone a few adjustments since the start of the school year to better accommodate students' needs.

The school's food service is provided through Snow Pond Arts Center. Students can purchase nutritious meals and snacks.

Snow Pond Arts Academy has not had any reportable bullying or harassment incidents, but is aware of the reporting requirements. A baseline will be established this year. The school's director is aware of the Commission-sponsored survey for teachers, staff, students, and parents.

CONCLUSION

Snow Pond Arts Academy will provide the Commission with a plan for moving into the second semester at the end of the month. With the changes planned for the leadership of the school the expectation is that items of concern will be addressed. The Commission will closely monitor the progress the school makes toward addressing the concerns as summarized in the challenges noted in this report.