



Certification and Higher Education Committee

Maine State Board of Education
Minutes of the February 25, 2026 Meeting

Members present: Victoria Cohen, Denham Ward, Thomas Keller, Committee Chair, and Mary Becker, Interim Staff for the State Board of Education.

Others present: Katie Rybakova, Chair, Lunder School of Education at Thomas College, Erin Reinhard - DOE - Certification Coordinator, Jane Loxterkamp EMCC, Jon Doty, Asst. Superintendent in RSU 34, and part of MSSA and MCLA, Wendi Malenfant, UMPI Education Program Director, Erin Straine, University of Maine - COEHD, Heather Perry, Superintendent of Schools Gorham School Department, and Deputy Commissioner Daniel Chuhta, Maine DOE.

- I. The meeting was called to order at 10:30 AM by Chair Keller. Committee members and Mary Becker introduced themselves.
- II. It was moved by Vicky Cohen and seconded by Denham Ward that the minutes from the January 28, 2026 meeting be approved. The motion passed unanimously.
- III. Public Comment: No Public Comments were offered.
- IV. Higher Education Update: Deputy Commissioner Chuhta reported for Michael Perry as Michael was attending a Legislative hearing of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee.

Deputy Commissioner Chuhta presented updates on the department's review of the Classic Planning Academy's application for temporary degree authorization and the University of Maine Machias' mid-cycle EPP update scheduled for March 2026. (Denham indicated he could be available for that; Vicky had some conflicts but also could be available). Tom expressed concern about the delayed completion of reports for Beal University and Northeastern University's Roux Institute. He said to expect more details from Michael Perry, but the Roux report was sitting on the review committee chair's desk awaiting final approval.

The committee reviewed a report on student teacher compensation, finding that while no institutions in the state currently pay student teachers, some may offer tuition waivers or fellowship awards. This report was distributed to committee members and will be discussed further at the March meeting of the C&HE Committee.

V. Educator Applications and Certification Updates

Erin Reinhard presented certification data showing 3,500 applications processed in January 2026, with May being the busiest month due to the July 1st deadline for teacher certifications. There were 395 initial applications for teacher certification processed and 2 retired teachers regained their certification. The certification office is experiencing staffing challenges with one team member taking parental leave until mid-June.

Erin presented data on educator outreach activities and application processing, noting that while applications processed may not reflect the full scope of their work, they averaged 380-390 initial teacher applications in January. Tom inquired about tracking educators through the portfolio pathway in MEIS as well as traditional and non-traditional pathways, and Erin explained that while the system isn't yet designed for this, they meet weekly with their vendor to make updates beneficial for educators.

The team discussed CHRC violations, with Erin clarifying that educators can work while renewing their credentials. Of the 877 CHRC violation letters sent last month, these are 90% the same as the ones sent the previous month. Tom praised Erin's team for their responsiveness and customer service in addressing certification issues.

VI. TEAMS and EPP Updates

Dr. Katie Rybakova presented on behalf of TEAME and Thomas College. She noted that TEAME had a meeting March 6 to which Tom has been invited. And that the annual EPP report form had been received. The group learned about new federal guidelines for earnings post-graduation and the potential implications for federal aid.

Concern was expressed about a financial barrier of paying for fingerprinting and a background check. Erin explained the process and costs (\$55 plus \$15) associated with fingerprinting for teacher candidates.

Katie presented updates on Thomas College's Future Teachers Academy, which saw increased participation from high school students interested in education. Wendi indicated that UMPI had a similar program and may 'appropriate' some of Katie's ideas.

VII. Other business:

The committee reviewed the recent public hearing on Chapter 115 and discussed plans for reviewing Chapter 114, which governs educator preparation programs. They also touched on the review of the possible alignment of Maine's program approval standards more closely with CAEP accreditation standards. Chapter 114 is for program approval and not accreditation. It made sense to committee members that TEAME be deeply involved in the review and revision of Chapter 114, by bringing current research and models from other states and nations.

VIII. The next meeting was scheduled for March 25, 2026.

IX. The meeting was adjourned the meeting at 11:45 AM.