***March 14, 2023 Commission Meeting Minutes Approved by Commission Vote on***

***April 11, 2023***

**The Maine Charter School Commission held a Regular Meeting on**

**Tuesday, March 14, 2023**

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| **Item Number** | **Agenda Item** |
| **1** | **Call to Order and Declare a Quorum** |
|  | The meeting, held via Zoom in accordance with the Commission’s remote meeting policy, was called to order by Commission Chair, Wilson Hess, at 1:08pm and a quorum was declared.  Commission member(s) present were Wilson Hess, Norm Higgins, Tom Keller, Tori Kornfield, Jim Handy, and Nichi Farnham.  Commission member(s) absent were: Leigh Weisenburger Albert.  Also present were Lana Ewing, Amy Allen, and Dania Heard.  *Commission member, Tori Kornfield, read the Commission’s Vision Statement.* |
| **2** | **Reminders** |
| 2a | This meeting is being recorded via Zoom. |
| 2b | We ask members of the public to hold comments until public comments are being heard. |
| 2c | When speaking, state your name and speak slowly and clearly and loudly enough for the captioner to pick up your comments. Lana will interrupt if the captioner is having a difficult time hearing what is being said. |
| **3** | **Comments from Commission Chair, Committee Reports and Additions or Adjustments to the Agenda** |
| 3a | **Comments from Commission Chair**  Chair Hess announced that the Search Committee has brought forth a candidate to fill the open Executive Director position. The Commission will enter into Executive Session for further discussion.  He also announced that his replacement on the State Board of Education has had his confirmation hearing with the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee and will be confirmed by the Senate in the next several days. Once confirmed, the candidate has 30 days to be sworn in. As such, this will likely be his last Commission Meeting and will be stepping down as Commission Chair and that Nichi Farnham will assume the duties of Commission Chair. |
| 3b | Welcome and Comments from Commissioner Makin  Lana Ewing, Interim Executive Director, welcomed and introduced Pender Makin, MDOE Commissioner. Commissioner Makin was invited to the meeting to discuss findings in the recently submitted 2021-22 Annual Report to the Commissioner and challenges surrounding access to data that is vital as the Commission considers performance of the public charter schools in the portfolio.  Norm Higgins shared that the Commission “has doubled down on school performance” and “performance was the Search Committee’s #1 priority while undergoing the search for the Commission’s next Executive Director.  Thoughts from Commissioner Makin:   * She is “pleased” with the Commission’s Performance Framework, making particular note of the new custom targets and how she’d like to see those targets be the focus of the Annual Report. * She is interested in understanding how the Commission defines success. * She “values the partnership” and shared that the Commission has “always been rigorous in their oversight of the charter schools”. * She is concerned about student retention indicating that when students leave a school and enroll elsewhere there’s a regression in learning and is interested in seeing our data (i.e., year over year enrollment, reasons why students are choosing charter schools and why they decide to leave). * She “was uncomfortable” to hear about the closing of Harpswell Coastal Academy stating it “is devastating to the community” and “hopes the Commission puts supports in place so that a closure doesn’t happen again”.   Tori Kornfield inquired about delays with the release of publicly reported data by the Department - in particular chronic absenteeism and graduation rates. She also asked about the suppression of some of that data as well as access to academic outcomes.  Commissioner Makin stated that there are federal requirements in place that protect small groups of students from being identified. She encouraged the Commission to request data directly from the charter schools and to use that data when making decisions. |
| 3c | **Committee Reports**   * Tori Kornfield - Chair, School Performance Committee - reported on the work being done by the Committee. * Nichi Farnham - Chair, Finance Committee - reported on the work being done by the Committee. * Norm Higgins - Chair, Ad-Hoc Search Committee - reported on the work being done by the Committee. * Wilson Hess - Chair, Executive Committee - reported on the work being done by the Committee. |
| 3d | **Additions or Adjustments to the Agenda**  Chair Hess recommended adding #13a “Search Committee Recommendation” and #14 “Special Nominating Committee for Vice Chair”. Both were added without objection. |
| 4 | **Meeting Minutes Approval** |
| 4a | To Consider the Minutes from the February 14, 2023 Commission Meeting  A copy of the draft minutes was distributed for review and consideration.  **Moved by Jim Handy; seconded by Tom Keller, and voted by roll call vote as follows** - Nichi Farnham (yes), Jim Handy (yes), Wilson Hess (yes), Norm Higgins (yes), Tom Keller (yes), and Tori Kornfield (yes) --to approve the minutes from the February 14, 2023 Commission Meeting. |
| **5** | **Public Comment\*** |
|  | Jana Lapoint - member of both the Baxter Academy for Technology and Science’s Board and the Maine Connections Academy’s Board - thanked Chair Hess for “leading with a steady hand and always striving for what is best for Maine’s children.”  Heather King - Head of School at Maine Arts Academy - gave an update on the school’s new location in Augusta sharing that they have received their certificate of occupancy and have been approved by the state fire marshal’s office. She also thanked the School Performance Committee for considering the school’s request for an increase in enrollment beginning in SY2023-24.  Ruth Dean - Vice Chair of the Baxter Academy for Technology and Sciences’ Governing Board - appreciates the addition of school-specific targets on the new Performance Framework and looks forward to showcasing Flex Friday, “a cornerstone of the Baxter Academy program”. |
| **6** | **Presentations** |
| 6a | School Spotlight - Baxter Academy for Technology and Science  Anna Marie Klein-Christie, Baxter Academy’s Executive Director, shared a slideshow with the Commission highlighting what’s happening at the school. Some notes of interest:   * Expects to have 387 students enrolled in the fall (with an aggressive waitlist) * Chronic Absenteeism is hovering around 28.5% * The school has not traditionally had extracurricular activities or after-school programming which will be a focus going forward. * Flex Friday projects are “as varied as the kids themselves” * Students held a vigil for the homeless and held a school-wide “Penny War” to help support the Preble Street Resource Center * 94.5% of students are on track to graduate |
| **7** | **Executive Director/Commission Staff Report** |
| 7a | School Updates   * Maine Arts Academy completed its Comprehensive Needs Assessment application for school-wide Title funding and because of the quality of the application it is being used as an exemplar by the MDOE. * ACADIA Academy’s “Eagle Soars Exhibition” will be held on March 30th beginning at 5:00pm. The event features Trimester Two student-completed projects. All are welcome to attend. * Maine Virtual Academy’s Curriculum Coordinator, Christine O’Grady, had an article published in the Journal of Education and Practice titled *Comparing Northwest Evaluation Association’s (NWEA) Benchmark Assessment Scores to College Board’s ACCUPLACER Scores: Is there a Correlation?* * Staff continue to meet and work with Harpswell Coastal Academy as they work toward closure in June noting that there have been successes and challenges along the way. The focus of the meetings has shifted to inventory and finances. HCA had hoped to sell the building to the Town of Harpswell, but the town turned down the proposal and are now looking into working with a commercial realtor. |
| 7b | Organizational Updates   * Mid-Year Check-In Meetings with schools are underway. The purpose is to gain the overall progress of meeting the criteria on the Performance Framework. These meetings are not statutorily-required, but something staff chooses to do. A full report of findings will be given during the April Commission Meeting. * Staff are working on revisions to the Site Visit Manual, particularly related to the clarification around the monitoring cycle. * Preliminary ED 279s were sent to all Board Chairs and Heads of School and should be used as a tool throughout the budget process. * The School Performance Committee is considering revisions to the Academic Growth section of the Performance Framework. Currently, schools are expected to have 60%+ of students meeting projected growth on the NWEA MAP Assessment. According to NWEA the percentage is high and suggests a range of 45%-55%. |
| 7c | Strategic Plan Update  The Commission adopted a 3-Year Strategic Plan in 2021. At that time, the Commission’s mission and vision were refined and five (5) strategic priorities were defined to help guide the Commission in its work. Lana gave an update on the progress of work toward that Plan. |
| 7d | Legislative Update  Representative Brennan has introduced L.D. 1089 -”An Act Regarding the Authorization of Public Charter Schools” The proposed bill allows the Commissioner of Education to override a decision made by the Maine Charter School Commission if the Commissioner determines that student health or academic well-being is at risk. The Public Hearing for this bill has not yet been scheduled. Staff will continue to watch the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee’s schedule and will keep the Commission updated. |
| 7e | Media Update  *(None)* |
| **8** | **Monthly School Portfolio/Data Report** |
| 8a | 2021-22 Certified Graduation Rates, Chronic Absenteeism and State Assessment Performance Results  Staff presented SY2021-22 certified data as it compares to state averages.   * 5 of the 10 schools are above the state average for chronic absenteeism. * 3 of the 7 high schools have graduation rates that are higher than the state average. It is important to note that two of the charter high schools have their graduation data suppressed by the state due to a small “n” size. * For ELA, the state has suppressed data for 4 of the schools. Of the remaining schools, 4 of the 6 are performing higher than the state average. * For Math, the state has suppressed data for 3 of the schools. Of the remaining schools, 4 of the 7 are performing higher than the state average. |
| **9** | **Unfinished Business** |
|  | *None* |
| **10** | **New Business Requiring Approval and/or Acceptance** |
| 10a | To Consider the Approval of the Pre-Opening Checklist for New Facility  A copy of the checklist was distributed for review and consideration.  **Moved by Nichi Farnham; seconded by Tori Kornfield, and voted by roll call vote as follows** - Nichi Farnham (yes), Jim Handy (yes), Wilson Hess (yes), Norm Higgins (yes), Tom Keller (yes), and Tori Kornfield (yes)--to approve the Pre-Opening Checklist for New Facility. |
| **11** | **New Business Requiring Notification to the Commission *(No formal action to be taken by the Commission)*** |
| 11a | New Governing Board Members: *None*  Resignations: *None*  Term Outs: *None*  Other:   * Dick Durost is longer a part of the Maine Arts Academy Board.   *No formal action required by the Commission.* |
| 11b | FY23 Budget vs. Actual Report  A copy of the dashboard report was presented for review.  *No formal action required by the Commission.* |
| **12** | **Future Topics** |
| 12a | April   * Mid-Year Check-In Meetings Update * Review Renewal Timeline for Maine Connections Academy * Preview Proposed FY24 Commission Budget   May   * Consider the Approval of the F24 Commission Budget |
| **13** | **Executive Session** |
|  | At 4:05pm Nichi Farnham moved that the Commission enter into Executive Session for the purposes of discussing personnel matters. This was seconded by Tori Kornfield and voted unanimously by those present to enter into Executive Session. |
| 13a | Search Committee Recommendation  At 4:32pm, the Commission returned from Executive Session and Nichi Farnham moved that the Commission offer the Executive Director position to Lana Ewing. This was seconded by Tori Kornfield and and voted by roll call vote as follows - Nichi Farnham (yes), Jim Handy (yes), Wilson Hess (yes), Norm Higgins (yes), Tom Keller (yes), and Tori Kornfield (yes)--to offer the Executive Director position to Lana Ewing. |
| **14** | **Special Nominating Committee for Vice Chair** |
|  | Chair Hess reminded Commission members of his impending departure from the Commission and shared that a nominee has been appointed (Brian Langley) to fill Nichi Farnham’s seat, the term of which expired on June 30, 2022.  Nichi will assume the role of Chair for as long as she remains on the Commission, leaving a vacancy in the Vice Chair position. Chair Hess appointed the current members of the Executive Committee to the Ad-Hoc Special Nominating Committee for Vice Chair and asked that the group meet as soon as possible to ensure that a Vice Chair can be named before both he and Nichi leave. |
| **15** | **Announcements** |
| 15a | Important Dates   * March 31 NCSI PD Session |
| 15b | Next Regular Business Meeting – April 11, 2023(***Ecology Learning Center, 230 Main Street, Unity***) |
| **16** | **Adjourn** |
|  | Chair Hess declared adjournment at 4:40pm with no objections. |

**\*** *The Charter School Commission does not allow airing of complaints in public meetings regarding Commission and charter school employees or school employment matters, in order to protect employee privacy, to comply with Maine law and pursuant to our contractual relation with the schools. To the extent that the Commission receives complaints and concerns relating to school employees in writing, those concerns will be reviewed and addressed by the Commission and its staff outside of a public meeting. This meeting is not the appropriate forum for such comments. You are free to direct your concerns in writing to the Commission’s Executive Director, if you have not done so already.*