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***March 8, 2022 Business Meeting Minutes Approved by Commission Vote on April 12, 2022***

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

**Tuesday, March 8, 2022**

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| **Item Number** | **Agenda Item** |
| **1** | **Call to Order and Declare a Quorum** |
|  | *A Commission Member Will Read the Commission’s Vision Statement*  The meeting, held in person and via Zoom in accordance with the Commission’s remote meeting policy, was called to order by Commission Chair, Wilson Hess, at 1:01pm and a quorum was declared.  Commission members present were Wilson Hess, Nichi Farnham, Shelley Reed, Victoria Kornfield, Jim Rier *(via Zoom)*, and Dr. Fern Desjardins *(via Zoom)*.  Also present were Jeremy Jones, Gina Post, Lana Ewing, and Amy Allen *(via Zoom)*. |
| **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. Gina will interrupt if the captioner is having a difficult time hearing what is being said. |
| **3** | **Additions or Adjustments to the Agenda** |
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| **4** | **Requires Approval by the Commission** |
| 4a | To Consider the Approval of Minutes from the February 8, 2022 Business Meeting  A copy of the minutes was distributed for review and consideration.  **Moved by Shelley Reed; seconded by Dr. Fern Desjardins and voted unanimously by those present** to approve the minutes from the February 8, 2022 Business Meeting. |
| 4b | To Consider the Approval of Safety Care Training Grant for Community Regional Charter School and Maine Arts Academy  A copy of the proposal was distributed for review and consideration.  **Moved by Shelley Reed; seconded by Nichi Farnham and voted unanimously by those present** to approve the Safety Care Training Grant for Community Regional Charter School and Maine Arts Academy. |
| 4c | **Commission Chair Announcements**  Chair Hess thanked Commission members for responding to the Doodle poll regarding availability for NACSA renewal training. Staff is working with NACSA to finalize a date and will send meeting invitation and joining instructions as soon as possible.  Chair Hess shared that the Commission met in person with Executive Director, Jeremy Jones, on February 15 to conduct his annual evaluation. Comments and results from the evaluation are being compiled and a summary will be made available. |
| **5** | **Public Comment\*** |
|  | Cynthia Shelmerdine, Harpswell Coastal Academy Governing Board Chair, shared that due to declining enrollment at the school continuing to maintain two campuses is no longer sustainable. The Board is working closely with the school community and is considering several different options. The Board will meet on March 16th to determine the best path forward and any updates from that meeting will be shared at the April Commission Meeting. |
| **6** | **Presentations** |
| 6a | Board Training Presentation by National Charter Schools Institute  Mary Bradley, Chief Operating Officer, gave an overview of the Institute and described the partnership they share with Commission staff in developing Board training that aligns with “Governing for Greatness”. The training, offered through the Epicenter platform, is self-paced and rooted in Maine statute. The first module went live in February and new content will be introduced through September. |
| 6b | School Spotlight – Ecology Learning Center  Laura Graham, Governing Board Chair, and Leza Packard, Head of School, shared a PowerPoint presentation highlighting the school and the strong partnerships – rooted in the school’s mission – that they have with the local community. |
| 6c | School Spotlight – Maine Arts Academy  Heather King, Head of School, shared a PowerPoint presentation highlighting the school – particularly its Theater and English Departments. She shared details about the school’s most recent production, REQUIM, that was written by a sophomore at the school. All productions are student lead, student written, and student directed. |
| **7** | **Executive Director/Commission Staff Report** |
| 7a | Progress on MeANS Charter Renewal  Jeremy shared that the MeANS Mid-Year Meeting was held on March 7th and that a progress timeline will be shared during the April Business Meeting. Attendance remains a concern and the school is working on plans and policies for improvement. The school achieved its MAP participation goal for the fall but fell a bit short for winter participation. |
| 7b | Progress on CRCS Charter Renewal  Jeremy shared that the school is currently on track to satisfy all of its original renewal conditions and gave an overview of proposed additional conditions stemming from concerns with financial audits. There are no academic conditions on the table at this time. Staff will meet with school leaders on March 15th for the Mid-Year Check-In and will report on growth data at the April Business Meeting. |
| 7c | Preview “Authorizing for All”  Jeremy shared that “Authorizing for All” brings together educators of all types from across the country to learn through guest speakers, videos, literature, action research, and each other to develop practices that support equitable and anti-racist oversight practices. Jeremy, Gina, and Lana are currently participating. Dr. Joseph Escobedo, one of the Authorizing for All team leaders and Senior Director of Charter Schools at Albuquerque Public Schools, will present during the April Business Meeting. |
| 7d | Update on Changes to Performance Framework for FY23  The Project Timeline and progress was shared. Gina and Lana are currently working on proposed changes and plan to have a draft available to share with school leaders in April. The first reading of the Performance Framework for FY23 will be in May with final consideration for approval in June. |
| 7e | Strategic Plan Update  Jeremy presented a document updating progress on the Strategic Plan. Some highlights are as follows:   * Commission staff is convening schools to share resources used to facilitate successful data meetings that lead to school staff using data to drive instruction. This training will be held on March 10th. * The National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) has offered a pro-bono training and development session related to renewal decisions. * Staff have created a “1-Click Print Board Packet”. A preview was shared, and Commission members were encouraged to reach out to Amy with any supply needs – ink, paper, etc. * Staff have been in contact with several organizations that provide expertise on facilities. From financing to construction, these organizations offer support to charter operators. Many of Maine’s charter public schools are identified as needing this type of support. * Staff fielded a request from Maine Arts Academy’s Board Chair regarding the feasibility of the charter schools coordinating on health care coverage. Findings were presented to charter operators on February 25th. * Staff will be working closely with board chairs while piloting board training throughout the spring and summer. User information and feedback will help guide the tracking of board training completion which will be included with new Performance Framework. * The first cohort of the Modern Classrooms Project wrapped up and there are currently 2 charter school educators registered for the spring cohort which runs from March-June and 3 registered for the summer program. Applications are still being accepted for the summer cohort. The Commission received a grant from the Maine Department of Education to cover the cost of tuition. * Staff have engaged an Augusta-based communications expert to help build stronger communications systems and tools. * Staff are working closely with state contractor, InforME, on website updates. * Staff have been talking with experts on student recruitment in an effort to connect organizations with operators in need. |
| 7f | Media Update   * [Who Authorizes: What We Know and Looking Ahead](https://www.qualitycharters.org/2022/02/who-authorizes-what-we-know-and-looking-ahead/) |
| 7g | Legislative Update  *None* |
| 7h | Mid-Year Meetings  A copy of the mid-year meeting guidance shared with school leaders was presented along with dates for each visit. The purpose of these meetings is to gauge the overall progress a school is making toward the mission and goals outlined in its charter and leaders are asked to be prepared to discuss the following – academics, attendance and chronic absenteeism, anticipated graduation rates and percentages of students on track to graduate, finances, current enrollment, student recruitment for next school year, facilities, staffing (openings, needs, successes), board (open seats, needs, successes), and any other topics identified.  Staff will report its findings to each school in writing. Schools will have an opportunity to preview the report before finalized. Reports will be presented to the full Commission for approval during the April Business Meeting. |
| **8** | **Old Business** |
| 8a | Committee Structure of Commission Members  This agenda item was previously tabled to give all Commission members ample time to review the proposal. The proposed structure is as follows:  **Executive Committee**   * Oversee the general governance and functioning of the Commission * Oversee and monitor the institutional planning process and the plan’s progress   **School Performance Committee**   * Ensure that Commissioners can make objective charter school decisions for authorization and renewal * Oversee and monitor the school performance assessment process, the status of charter school academic progress, accountability of decision-making, and quality school development   **Finance Committee**   * Establish and monitor financial performance framework guidance and externally validated data to hold schools accountable for near-and long-term financial health and for them to build capacity in financial expertise * Oversee and monitor the Commission’s financial condition, reporting, and planning   **Moved by Nichi Farnham; seconded by Shelley Reed and voted unanimously by those present** to approve the proposed Committee Structure of Commission Members as presented. |
| **9** | **New Business** |
| 9a | Recommended Actions from CRCS Audit Analysis  As part of its renewal conditions adopted in December 2021, CRCS was tasked with the delivery of a financial audit in accordance with Commission policy. CRCS submitted the financial audit as requested; however, a thorough review and analysis of the audit revealed repeated shortcomings in the financial processes of the organization.  Concerns   * Facilities: Information in the audit suggests that construction is currently in progress and has been for multiple, successive years. The architect and the builder appear to be the same firm calling into question necessary arms-length separation of these functions. * Oversight and management of accounts: CRCS is currently selling accounting services to two other operators – Ecology Learning Center and Maine Arts Academy. This presents issues including protection of confidential information, Executive Directors having effective management of accounts, and that the operator selling the services is struggling to perform in this area. * Auditor: The operator has used the same auditor for several years in a row, violating a non-profit best practice of rotating auditors. * Persistent management letter comments: CRCS has had consistent management letter comments on their last several audits, indicating that the organization is not properly addressing concerns.   Requests   * Governing Board agendas: The Governing Board needs to develop their own meeting agendas that drive strong school governance especially as it relates to financial management   Additional Conditions to be Met for Renewal   * Facilities & Safety: Secure an independent review by an engineering firm to review the safety of current facilities and produce a plan that demonstrates when construction will be completed. * Independent Auditing Services: Solicit proposals to change auditor * Cease Selling Accounting Services to Other Operators: Cease accounting partnerships with Ecology Learning Center and Maine Arts Academy and/or advise them of potential issues and/or establish clearer agreements and guidelines that are documented between all parties * Proper Financial Management: Ensure that all management letter comments and material weaknesses over procurement are addressed. Document process changes and initiate oversight and score carding. Launch a review of financial policies.   Staff recommends the inclusion of these additional conditions to be met for renewal in the renewal timeline document and timed out as appropriate.  **Moved by Shelley Reed; seconded by Jim Rier and voted unanimously by those present** to approve the inclusion of additional conditions to be met for renewal in the renewal timeline document and timed out as appropriate. An updated renewal timeline will be shared at the April Business Meeting. |
| **10** | **Requires Notification to and Acceptance by the Commission** |
| 10a | The following new governing board member appointments were announced:   * Chris Lewis to the Ecology Learning Center Governing Board * Esther Williamson to the Ecology Learning Center Governing Board   **Moved by Nichi Farnham; seconded by Shelley Reed and voted unanimously by those present** to accept notification of appointments as presented. |
| 10b | To Consider and Accept FY22 Budget vs. Actual YTD – March Report  Jim suggested that any discussion and action on the most recent report be tabled until the next Business Meeting to allow ample time to review.  **Moved by Shelley Reed; seconded by Victoria Kornfield and voted unanimously by those present** to table any action on the FY22 Budget vs. Actual YTD – March Report to the April Meeting. |
| **11** | **Monthly School Portfolio/Data Report** |
| 11a | Enrollment/Catchment Area Project  Jeremy shared a preview of the project that staff have been working on. The project looks at the total number of students enrolled in public schools across the state of Maine and breaks those students into each charter public schools’ catchment area and shows the number of students available for recruitment and enrollment. |
| **12** | **Future Topics** |
| 12a | April   * “Authorizing for All” Presentation by Dr. Joseph Escobedo * Epicenter Scorecard Project and Renewal Application Update * Mid-Year Meeting Reports |
| **13** | **Announcements** |
| 13a | This Month’s Celebrations   * Congratulations to Chris Maloney of Maine Arts Academy who has been named a recipient of The Society for Science’s [STEM Research Grant](https://www.societyforscience.org/press-release/society-awards-135k-to-95-teachers/)! |
| 13b | Next Regular Business Meeting – April12, 2022 *(Room #103A – Cross Office Building and Zoom)* |
| **14** | **Adjourn** |
|  | The meeting was adjourned at 3:46pm.  **Chair Hess declared adjournment at 3:46pm 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.*