

Maine Learning Innovations

Minutes for a Meeting of the Board of Directors held June 20, 2023

Pursuant to email and public website notices, a virtual meeting of the Board of Maine Learning Innovations was convened on Zoom at 3:00 PM, June 20^h, 2023. Board members attending were Donna Pelletier, Stacey Blanchard, Nicholas “Nick” Gannon, Tina Meserve, and Peter Mills. Amy Carlisle was excused. A quorum was present.

Attending from MEVA were Melinda Browne, Donald Fournier, Mehry Mohammadi, Jillian Dearborn, Stephanie Emery, Cristina O’Grady, Chelsea Osgood, Lena Vitagliano, and Jennifer Hight.

Attending from Stride were Todd McIntire, and Tom Travia.

Opening Items.

Approval of Minutes. Nick motioned to approve the minutes of the Maine Virtual Academy (MEVA) Governing Board Business Meetings of May 16th, 2023. Tina seconded. All in favor, so moved.

Finance Report.

MEVA’s three-year financial plan is due to the Maine Charter School Commission (MCSC) on Aug 31st. Jennifer Hight and Dr. Browne have attended a training session relating to what the MCSC has outlined for this plan. The MCSC wants to ensure that school boards are having ongoing discussions about plans surrounding staff retention. They feel staffing is becoming a challenge. Discussions surrounding student enrollment, reviewing mission statements, and so forth should be looked at and regularly updated. Jennifer recommends setting up a workshop focusing on drafting MEVA’s initial financial narrative, with a view towards adjusting the plan from time to time.

Donna confirmed July 12th at 2:00 pm for the financial planning workshop. Dr. Browne committed to sending the Zoom invitations and publishing the workshop notice on the school’s websites.

Administration. Dr. Melinda Browne gave the Head of School Report.

Dr. Browne provided an update on MEVA’s spring 2023 in-person state testing effort. Participation was strong and boded well for future administrations.

MEVA’s Spring 2023 MEA Math/ELA Participation.

(Includes students who participated in MSAA).

7th Grade: 35/35 (100%).

8th Grade: 53/55 (96.36%).

Combined MS: 88/90 (97.77%).

10th Grade/HS: 86/92 (93.48%).

Schoolwide: 174/182 (95.60%).

MEVA’s Spring 2023 MEA Science Participation.

(Includes students who participated in MSAA).

8th Grade: 52/55 (94.55%).

11th Grade: 99/107 (92.52%).

Schoolwide: 151/162 (93.21%).

In-Person State Testing Effort Continues:

- MEVA is planning for the fall 2023 state testing that requires students in grades 7, 8, and 10, to complete the MEA math and reading. The window opens on Oct. 2nd, 2023.
- Our administration will include similar elements: Eight testing locations, supported by laptops, prepared by Stride. The rented laptops function as a mobile computer lab that reliably supports our testing efforts.
- We will provide individual and small group testing as needed.
- The goal is 95% participation for applicable grade levels and subgroups.
- In-person (MEA) state testing continues in the spring 2024 for math and reading (grades 7, 8, & 10), and science (grades 8 & 11).

Regarding fall/spring testing, Jennifer Hight suggested using remaining federal relief funds to purchase laptops for testing. Donna agreed to brainstorming ideas about purchasing computers, looking at other options (rather than renting) for testing computers.

Tina said that Chromebooks may serve the purpose if MEVA purchased them specifically for testing. Stacey expressed concerned about Chromebooks not being sustainable or compatible with testing, based on her expertise and employment in IT. It was Stacey’s opinion that Chromebooks were very limited in compatibility with programs. As a result, Stacey did not think that Chromebooks would be a good choice. Donna asserted that MEVA needed to research if there were more viable options out there.

MCSC Annual Monitoring & State Reporting:

- MEVA is achieving its school performance measures for SY-2022/2023.
- We are meeting with the MCSC on the morning of August 2nd via Zoom to discuss school performance.
- MEVA is currently completing all the required MCSC and state reporting obligations.

Highlighting MEVA’s Retention Initiative:

- MEVA consistently implemented our retention initiative during SY-2022/2023 that asked faculty to refer students for rapid interventions to address multiple issues, such as presenting low engagement and poor grades, as well as expressing interest in leaving the school.
- These schoolwide efforts to retain students worked, as evidenced by the data over the past school year, in comparison to the previous year.
- MEVA realized an overall 6% gain in post 10/1/22 retention. The 7th grade realized a 15% YOY improvement, and the 8th grade retention improved by 9% from the previous school year.

Post 10/1/22 Retention – 6/9/23 (Last Day of School):

Grade	Withdrawals	10/1 Count	Retention (PY, with YOY % change)
7	1	31	97% (82%, +15%)
8	6	56	89% (80%, +9%)
9	3	55	95% (97%, -2%)
10	5	85	94% (90%, +4%)

11	4	113	96% (90%, +6%)
12	0	98	100% (94%, +6%)
Total	19	438	96% (90%, +6%)

Withdrawal Exit Surveys:

- The School Survey – We always complete 100% of them. This is information staff collects from the parent surrounding the reason for unenrolling.
- The Parent Exit Survey – Collected from the parent directly on their reason for withdrawing; always sent to the parent and asked of them to complete at the time of withdrawal. About one third to half of parents who are sent this form typically complete them.

Though MEVA has excellent retention, the top reasons that students withdrew were:

- Lack of socialization.
- Student not motivated to complete work in this environment.
- Spot opened at preferred school.
- MEVA has programming and supports that address these challenges, including offering clubs and other social activities, providing regular team meetings and daily academic supports, and initiating win-back the student efforts.

MEVA prioritizes building/maintaining constructive relationships with our students and their families.

- Daily Morning Assembly.
- Weekly Grade-Level Advisory Groups that provide time for socializing and practicing twenty-first century skills.
- Weekly clubs such as Anime, Prodigy, Gaming, Creative Writing/Reading; Chess, Coding, Drama, and Debate, and American Sign Language (ASL) are popular schoolwide activities.
- MEVA has an active National Honor Society (NHS) Chapter that organizes community service projects, including local food drives.
- MEVA ran a March reading challenge, encouraging students to read, with prize incentives.
- We publish a monthly newsletter to keep students and parents informed about our offerings.
- MEVA hosts high school graduation and eighth-grade recognition ceremonies that are widely attended.
- MEVA’s strong retention, continuity of enrollment, and state/local assessment participation rates are evidence that our engagement efforts are working.

Dr. Browne made the point that the Panorama School Climate Survey was an effective instrument for monitoring school culture. MEVA benefited from obtaining stakeholder data each year.

Annual Panorama School Climate Survey:

- The MCSC requires MEVA to administer the annual Panorama School Climate Survey each spring.
- This past year, MEVA ran the survey during the first three weeks of April 2023.
- Stakeholder participation increased in the family and student groups.
- Results became available yesterday, June 19th.
- Initial analysis indicates that MEVA attained favorable results in the targeted areas, in accordance with the SY-2022/2023 action plan.
- A new action plan for SY-2023/2024 incorporates the latest data, builds on our successes, and shifts the focus to facilitate continuous improvement.

Dr. Browne reviewed the SY-2022/2023 Panorama Survey Action Plan that was developed from last year's data.

1. *Target School Fit: How well do the activities offered at your child's school match his/her interests?*
 - **Action Plan (Families): Individual Learning Plans (ILPs).**
2. *Target Rigorous Expectations: How often do your teachers make you explain your answers?*
 - **Action Plan (Students): Instructional Maps and Course Development.**
3. *Target Feedback and Coaching: How often do you receive feedback on your teaching? How much feedback do you receive on your teaching? How much do you learn from the teacher evaluation processes at your school?*
 - **Action Plan (Teachers): Increase teacher/peer observations and feedback. Review teacher evaluation processes; seek faculty input.**
4. *Target Feedback and Coaching: How much feedback do you receive on your work? How much do you learn from the evaluation processes at your school?*
 - **Action Plan (Staff): Increase staff observations and feedback. Review evaluation processes; seek faculty input.**

2023 Panorama: Family = 224 (PY 135, +89) Respondents.

- School Climate. 79% (MCSC 76%; Nationally 99th %ile).
- School Safety. 96% (MCSC 86%; Nationally 99th %ile).
- School Fit. 62% (MCSC 65%; Nationally 70th %ile).
- *Met the SY-2022/2023 MCSC Performance Measure.*

2023 Panorama: Students = 313 (PY 274, +39) Respondents:

- School Climate. 73% (Nationally 99th %ile).

Panorama changed students' questions, so some of the data for the MCSC's performance framework was not available. However, MEVA was reviewing the new results as follows:

- *School Belonging. 46% (Nationally 70th %ile).*
- *School Engagement 29% (Nationally 50th %ile).*
- *Met the SY-2022/2023 MCSC Performance Measure.*

2023 Panorama Survey: Teachers = 47 Respondents:

- School Climate. 72% (Nationally 99th %ile).
- School Leadership. 75% (Nationally 90th %ile).
- Professional Learning. 74% (Nationally 99th %ile).
- Feedback and Coaching. 67% (Nationally 99th %ile).
- *Met the SY-2022/2023 MCSC Performance Measure.*

2023 Panorama Survey: Staff = 11 Respondents:

- School Climate. 76% (Nationally 99th %ile).
- School Leadership. 93% (Nationally 99th %ile).
- Professional Learning. 82% (Nationally 99th %ile).
- Feedback and Coaching. 82% (Nationally 99th %ile).
- *Met the SY-2022/2023 MCSC Performance Measure.*

Using this year's data, Dr. Browne presented the new SY-2023/2024 Panorama Survey Action Plan, and highlighted changes from the previous plan:

1. *Target School Fit: How well do the activities offered at your child's school match his/her interests?*
 - **Action Plan (Families): Individual Learning Plans (ILPs).**
2. *Target School Engagement: When you are not in school how often do you talk about ideas from your classes?*
 - **Action Plan (Students): Classroom Discussion and extension activities.**
3. *Target Feedback and Coaching: How often do you receive feedback on your teaching? How much feedback do you receive on your teaching? How much do you learn from the teacher evaluation processes at your school?*
 - **Action Plan (Teachers): Increase teacher/peer observations and feedback. Review teacher evaluation processes; seek faculty input on professional development.**
4. *Target Feedback and Coaching: How much feedback do you receive on your work? How much do you learn from the evaluation processes at your school?*
 - **Action Plan (Staff): Increase staff observations and feedback. Review evaluation processes; seek faculty input on professional development.**

Given MEVA's strong in-person testing participation, solid performance results, and positive school culture, Dr. Browne planned to complete an enrollment expansion application:

- We have learned that MEVA is eligible to apply to the MCSC for an enrollment expansion.
- The proposed increase raises our cap from 390 students plus/minus 10% to 450 students plus/minus 10%. If granted the expansion, MEVA plans to slowly increase enrollment.
- The timeline is to share the draft application with the MEVA governing board at the July 18th meeting, and to subsequently submit it to the MCSC.
- The MCSC will review the application and make its decision by the Winter 2024.
- If approved, MEVA would begin incrementally expanding enrollment starting with the October 1st, 2024, count, which would impact revenues for SY-2025/2026, the first year of our expected new contract.

Increased revenues and funding requests:

- MEVA is proposing to utilize increased revenues, gleaned from expanding enrollment, for funding the summer school and adding a science position.
- In the short term, Dr. Browne asked if we could add a SY-2023/2024 science teaching position utilizing federal relief funds?

Donna asked why MEVA was looking to fund a science position for high school?

Dr. Browne said that the proposed new position would reduce class sizes and provide opportunities for MEVA to increase science offerings. MEVA currently had three science teachers serving high school students. The other departments (English and math) were more robust with staffing, except for Social Studies, which had three high school teachers.

Donna asked how many courses do the three high school science teachers manage? Donna was concerned that at some point MEVA may not have the funds to keep the proposed new addition on the faculty. Donna wanted to understand the course/teacher breakdowns to determine MEVA's needs. Tina requested more information about how many students were in each class and section. Tina wondered if there was a bigger need in English (than in science) due to our test scores.

Dr. Browne reported that she had applied for a Maine Department of Education (MDOE) \$40k tutoring grant but had not heard back yet. This grant was specifically written for/with the science department. Dr.

Browne said MEVA would like to strengthen science, because of its popularity. Science was a venue to academically engage students.

Nick requested a breakdown of current science courses with student numbers.

Donna appreciated that MEVA currently had the funds to support the proposed new science role but was concerned about future viability. Donna said that the commission would like to see that if we brought in more students (expanded enrollment) that we would be able to effectively support them.

Dr. Browne committed to bringing the requested information about MEVA’s science courses to the July board meeting.

SY-2023/2024 New Enrollment Update 6/20:

- **Seat Offers Made: 10** open seat offers, 17 new applications in June.
- **Families Actively working their application: 36.**
- **School Approvals: 86** have been approved- 5 of which are returning to MEVA after withdrawing to brick and mortar. 4 additional students are pending acceptance- waiting for a parent/guardian call back.
- We are trending approximately **20%** ahead of last year, in terms of interest and applications.
- **We are on track to have a full school by October 1st, 2023.**

SY-2023/2024 Accepted Students by Grade Level – 6/20:

Grade	Accepted
7	13
8	22
9	13
10	20
11	7
12	11
Total	86

Governance.

The board discussed the SY23/24 Business Manager Job Description. Tina suggested adding some verbs to the proposed job description, providing a few examples within the document.

Nick Gannon motioned to approve the business manager job description with the additions of verbs. Stacey seconded. All in favor, so moved.

Resignations & Retirements:

Dr. Browne noted that Judy Wheeler, Special Education Teacher, was retiring. Donna congratulated and thanked her for service to MEVA and wished Judy well.

Dr. Browne presented the nominations of professional staff for SY 2023/2024: Melissa Dubovik, Math Teacher, and Caroline Peinado, Special Education Teacher. Both new faculty members were coming to MEVA with significant experience.

Donna welcomed both hires to MEVA and looked forward to their success.

Public Discussion. Dr. Browne said that she was sending a few policies for the board to review at the upcoming July 18th meeting.

Nick motioned to enter Executive Session under 1 MRSA §405, sub-§6, ¶A & ¶E to discuss an employee evaluation. Tina seconded. All in favor, so moved.

Adjournment. Tina motioned to adjourn. Nick seconded. All in favor, so moved. The meeting was adjourned at 4:23 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Stephanie Emery and Melinda Browne
Secretary pro tempore