

Maine Learning Innovations

Minutes for a Meeting of the Board of Directors held August 15, 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, August 15th, 2023. Board members attending were Donna Pelletier, Amy Carlisle, Stacey Blanchard, Nicholas “Nick” Gannon, Tina Meserve, and Peter Mills. A quorum was present.

Attending from MEVA were Melinda Browne, Donald Fournier, Christina O’Grady, Mehry Mohammadi, Jillian Dearborn, Stephanie Emery, and Lena Vitagliano.

Attending from Stride was Tom Travia.

Opening Items.

Approval of Minutes. Nick motioned to approve the minutes of the Maine Virtual Academy (MEVA) Governing Board Business Meetings of July 18th, 2023. Tina seconded. All in favor, so moved.

Finance Report. Jennifer Hight was unable to attend the meeting, but she provided the following report, which was read by Dr. Browne.

We have been very busy with financials the past several weeks. Here are some updates:

- 4th Quarter financials. The plan is to have them complete by the end of the week; they are delayed due to end-of-year reconciliations.
- Audit: This is scheduled the week of October 9th. As part of the completion of the 4th quarter financials we are working on reconciliations of the accounts in preparation of the audit. This also should be complete by the end of the week.
- The 2024 Budget has been uploaded into NEO and accepted.
- We are working on the Three-Year Plan for the Maine Charter Commission. I sent a draft of our progress to date to Joe Drago, with the Charter Commission, on 8/7. I am waiting to hear a time that we can discuss the draft over the phone. In the meantime, we should keep moving forward with the plan. Melinda, Jillian, and I have a Zoom set up for tomorrow morning to continue the process.
- We need to schedule another meeting next week with Board members to finalize the plan and send it to a vote. I am available to meet any time next week.

Regarding the FY23 Q4 Financials, Donna said we do not have the items we need to vote on right now, and a deadline extension will be needed. Dr. Browne committed to making an extension request to the Maine Charter School Commission (MCSC) and letting the board know the outcome. Donna wanted to schedule a financial workshop for next week. Dr. Browne agreed to coordinate possible dates with the board and post notice on the school’s websites.

In preparation for the upcoming annual audit, Dr. Browne reviewed the list of MEVA Governing Board Financial Policies/Procedures, which are posted on the school’s websites:

- BCB Board Member Conflict of Interest – Updated: 3/15/2022.
- DFF Student Activities Funds – New: 7/18/2023.
- DJH Purchasing and Contracting: Procurement Staff Code of Conduct – Updated: 3/15/2022.
- DKC Expense Authorization and Reimbursement – New- 3/21/2023.

- DN School Properties Disposition – Updated: 3/15/2022.
- JJE Student Fundraising Activities – New: 7/18/2023.
- Check Signatory Procedure – Board Approval Date: 9/20/2022.
- Travel Administrative Procedure – Board Approval Date: 3/21/2023.
- Course Reimbursement Form – Board Adoption Date: 4/25/2023.

Dr. Browne discussed adding the BCB Conflict of Interest Form to the policies manual. Dr. Browne asked if board members should sign this form annually, even though it was not explicitly required by BCB? Amy Carlisle remembered how this form originated; it was a recommendation that this form be a part of best practices for the board. Dr. Browne said that a question that came up from time to time with the commission was, “Is a Stride employee on the board?” Dr. Browne confirmed that there were no Stride employees serving on the MEVA governing board. Donna asserted that collecting the forms on an annual basis was unnecessary, as it was extra, unneeded work. This was not something that was done in her prior experience at the Augusta School District. Donna suggested that we wait until after the audit to see if it was needed.

Dr. Browne shared concerns that recently came up with Bangor Savings, which appeared to have bought out or changed credit card providers. Jillian Dearborn observed that MEVA received two different credit card bills now, it seemed that in the statement from the bank that they split the main card between two bills. This was concerning because the other card number was not being used at all. Jillian was only able to pay one of the two statements, because account restrictions prevented her from paying the remaining balance. Donna asked if both cards had the same number. Jillian reported that the statements had two different numbers. Dr. Browne asked if Amy could reach out to this new company and cancel the card not being used. When Dr. Browne had called, she was informed that the owner of the dormant account was Amy, dating back to the school’s founding. Donna said it would be hard to close it out with a balance on it. Amy committed to calling the credit card company, with Jillian and Dr. Browne on the phone, to straighten it out. Jillian planned to set up a time to resolve this statement/card issue.

Donna clarified to board members that Amy was one of the founders, and thus, had her name on the small startup account. Amy reported that the Maine Learning Innovations savings account of approximately \$7,800 was in place to cover an unexpected expense; it was an emergency fund for the nonprofit corporation.

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

Annual Monitoring Update:

- Met with the MCSC administration on August 2nd.
- Reviewed performance data from MEVA’s prior three years.
- We answered questions and received their feedback.
- We may expect our SY-2022/2023 annual monitoring report within a month.
- MEVA is well positioned for the approval of our enrollment expansion request and charter contract renewal.

Dr. Browne reported that the overall the monitoring meeting was positive. Donna recalled hearing Lana Ewing from MCSC say she was impressed with MEVA’s remarkable results. Lana said that MEVA was meeting and exceeding its performance measures. Donna did not hear any MCSC recommendations yet. Lana Ewing and Amy Allen, from MCSC, asked if MEVA would be willing to share successes with other schools. Donna said yes, we would be willing to help other schools, if requested.

Dr. Browne shared some of MEVA's core practices that worked, including providing excellent service to our students and families, ensuring they are served well within a competitive school choice market.

Dr. Browne presented MEVA's Mission and Vision and commented that no changes were needed at this time, based on stakeholder feedback:

School Mission:

Maine Virtual Academy's (MEVA) mission is to develop each student's full potential with learner-centered instruction, research-based curriculum and educational tools and resources to provide a high-quality learning experience for grade 7-12 students who are in need of alternative educational options. MEVA will develop an Individualized Learning Plan (ILP) with specific learning goals to meet each student's needs. MEVA's rigorous curriculum is aligned to the eight Maine content areas, the Maine Learning Results, the Common Core State Standards and the Next Generation Science Standards.

School Vision:

MEVA will be a leading 21st century public charter school in Maine and will improve student learning outcomes through individualized instruction, as evidenced by student academic proficiency, student academic growth, post-secondary readiness, and the demonstration of 21st century skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, and self-direction. MEVA will empower students to acquire the academic and life skills needed to succeed in post-secondary education and career opportunities. Our graduates will be prepared for college or other postsecondary career training opportunities.

Dr. Browne said that MEVA's "secret sauce" was understanding our core practices:

- 1. Win over students and their families to the MEVA mission and vision by providing excellent service. Thoughtful and consistent communication is the foundation of building successful rapport with our families and students.
- 2. Execute our individualized, continuous cycle of assessment, instruction, and remediation, without disruptions.
- 3. Prioritize innovative, data-driven, problem solving and process improvement through faculty collaboration, maintaining the cadence of regular large and small group team meetings, building on proven structures.
- 4. Utilize virtual telecommunication venues to the maximum extent possible to facilitate equitable teaching and learning, and to maintain an accessible school community.

As a result of our unwavering focus on, and understanding of, core practices that drive our decisions, MEVA is a high performing public charter school.

- Academically,
- Operationally, and
- Financially.
- MEVA is meeting/exceeding its performance measures and accomplishing its mission and vision.
- MEVA has a plan to sustain its results.

SY-2023/2024 Opportunities:

- Given our successful outcomes over the past three years, MEVA has the most to gain by sharpening the execution and understanding of our core practices, while continuing to build innovative, data-driven, solutions on top of our proven structures.
- Current MEVA improvement initiatives focus on refining MTSS, advisory groups, course feedback, and live session discussion and extension activities.

- We are aiming for consistency across grade levels, with respect to students' growth and achievement in math, reading, and language usage, as well as their perceptions of school climate.

Dr. Browne noted that MEVA had launched SY-2023/2024 with teacher professional development (PD), as follows:

- Two-weeks, August 14th through 25th.
- Communications.
- Teacher practices.
- Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS).
- Advisory.
- Products trainings.
- State compliance trainings (Vector platform).

Tina asked, who planned the teacher PD? Dr Browne said that this was a collaborative effort; for example, Stephanie Emery managed the state compliance and Vector Training platform, Lena Vitagliano handled the special education trainings, and Don Fournier and Christina O'Grady handled the academic-related trainings. It was a team effort and teachers gave feedback on what they needed as well. Each year, teacher days were based on one-hundred-ninety (190) days to ensure that there was time for PD and compliance trainings. Donna asked how many total new hires we had, who started on August 14th? Dr. Browne reported five new employees, overall.

Dr. Browne reported that the MDOE awarded MEVA the Innovative Instruction and Tutoring Grant, based on our application that included plans from our science teachers. MEVA was one of four school districts whose applications were approved.

Description: The proposed MEVA Innovative Instruction and Tutoring Grant funds a 1.0 FTE certified teacher or highly trained paraprofessional who focuses on developing/facilitating project-based learning opportunities for our neediest, disengaged students within the self-paced (asynchronous) science courses. Projects incorporate students' interests and experiences, utilizing home and community-based materials/resources. The targeted caseload is tutoring up to twenty-five (25) students at any given time with individual and/or very-small group instruction. The projects align with science, math, and English standards, motivating students to complete rigorous projects that develop these skills. Completing the projects allows the students to earn interdisciplinary credit in science, math, and English.

Rationale: Students in self-paced (asynchronous) science courses overwhelmingly opt to engage in projects rather than the traditional path through the content. Providing student choice, allows students to gain critical 21st century thinking skills, scientific inquiry skills, and mathematical skills.

Award: \$40,000.

Additional discussions with Dr. Browne and the board surrounded the innovative grant that Dr. Browne discovered in an MDOE Newsletter. Dr. Browne consulted Christina O'Grady and the science department to create a plan that would make use of this grant. Dr. Browne then wrote up as the grant application and submitted it in early May 2023. This grant developed science project-based learning through tutoring.

Donna asked what grade levels we were targeting? Dr. Browne said the grant was aimed at supporting high school students. Donna wondered how MEVA was selecting the twenty-five students to be part of this program. Dr. Browne said anyone who was in the self-paced or project-based learning courses and

demonstrated a need would be selected. Students who went into the self-paced courses were typically credit deficient. There was likely a media spotlights associated with this grant as well.

Tina asked if MEVA had hired the science tutor yet, who would be associated with this grant?

Dr. Browne said yes, we had someone in mind who was already hired who would fit into this program. The board had approved and given the go ahead to bringing on a science position at the last meeting.

Dr. Browne reported that Beth Lambert of the MDOE was the coordinator of this grant and had met with Dr. Browne to discuss. The grant was good for one year during FY24 and it helped offset the cost of bringing someone on board. MEVA was awarded a similar grant several years ago. Donna was glad the MDOE awarded the grant to at least one public charter school.

Dr. Browne presented the SY-2023/2024 new enrollment updates as of August 14th:

- Seat Offers Made: 15 open seat offers, 38 new applications in August.
- Families Actively working their application: 45.
- School Approvals: 130 have been approved - 4 additional students are pending acceptance-waiting for a parent/guardian call back.
- We are trending approximately 2% 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:

Grade	Accepted
7	18
8	29
9	25
10	23
11	16
12	19
Total	130

Governance.

FY24 Board Goals:

Donna shared, discussed, and adjusted the proposed board goals.

Goal 1: In order to support administrators and staff to provide a high-quality learning experience for the MEVA student population, *all* School Board members will participate in the minimal professional development opportunities provided by MCSC per MEVA's performance framework.

Goal 2: The MEVA School Board will ensure the school provides a high-quality learning experience by ensuring the development of a rigorous program of studies.

Goal 3: The MEVA School Board will provide a continuous learning experience for students by engaging in the school's renewal process to begin in the Spring of 2024.

Goal 4: As the Maine legislature has enacted a new law specific to teacher salaries, the School Board will ensure the development of an updated regional competitive salary scale survey.

Tina motioned to approve the board goals. Stacey seconded, all in favor, so moved.

Dr. Browne asked the board to review EBCA: Crisis Plan – Emergency Management, as an annual exercise. Tina asked if we should add in or clarify somewhere, that the board be notified on serious circumstances for awareness purposes. Donna stated that Dr. Browne had shared important information in the past on several occasions. Tina noted that it made sense for Dr. Browne to inform the chair of any serious incidents and the chair to share with board members.

Dr. Browne reported that the SY-2023/2024 Parent Student Handbook (PSHB) was updated to incorporate the Crown Act and minor adjustments to align with current practice.

Stacey motioned to approve the updated SY-2023/2024 PSHB. Tina seconded, all in favor, so moved.

Dr. Browne said that Holly Feyler, Special Education Teacher, had resigned to work at another Maine school district, and Jennifer McNally, Special Education Teacher, was hired.

Public Discussion. Dr. Mary Madden will present the results of her independent third-party evaluation studies at the September board meeting. Donna asked if the board would receive a copy of the report in advance? Dr. Browne said, yes, the board would receive the report by mid-September.

Donna reminded that the next meeting, September 19th, was the Annual Meeting, and a slate of board seats would be ready for vote.

Adjournment. Tina motioned to adjourn. Donna seconded. All in favor, so moved. The meeting was adjourned at 4:17 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Stephanie Emery and Melinda Browne
Secretary pro tempore