

Maine Learning Innovations

Minutes for a Meeting of the Board of Directors held December 15, 2020

Pursuant to email and public website notices, a virtual meeting of the Board of Maine Learning Innovations was convened on Zoom at 2:00 PM, December 15, 2020. Board members attending were Amy Carlisle, Donna Pelletier, and Peter Mills. Kim Whitman, and Ed LeBlanc were absent.

Attending from MEVA were Melinda Browne, Donald Fournier, Jillian Dearborn, Lena Vitagliano, Jennifer Hight, Chelsea Osgood, Christina O'Grady, Cheryl Brigham, Mehry Mohammadi, Lisa Plimpton (evaluator & consultant), and Attorney Bill Ferdinand.

Attendees from K12 were Stephanie Emery, Lizzie Malvicini, Mary Markert, Jordan Goldman, and Todd McIntire. Bob Kautz attended from the Charter Commission.

Minutes. Upon motion by Donna, seconded by Amy, minutes for the meeting of November 17, 2020, were approved.

Report from Third Party Evaluator. Lisa Plimpton addressed three issues in this year's Third Party Evaluation Report:

- Performance of K12 under its MEVA contract;
- MEVA's enrollment and course data; and
- Career & College readiness--a review of MEVA's graduates in the classes of 2018 and 2019.

Lisa has reviewed data from MEVA and other schools and interviewed several teachers and other staff. She presented a series of illuminating slides.

Relationship with K12. Lisa said that components of the K12 Admin Service contract overlap with those covered as direct services under the Educational Products and Services Agreement (EPSA). Her report contains a side by side list of how the description of services overlaps for student recruitment, for marketing and for enrollment. She recommends that the parties clarify which elements are part of supplemental Administrative services and which should be considered as part of the basic service contract. In general, she thought the relationship is a good one. The three on site people from K12 feel as though they are part of the team. K12 has gone above and beyond.

Tech support would be difficult to replicate elsewhere. Day to day work with K12 staff is valuable. Getting special service for parents is beneficial.

Areas for improvement include replacing Blackboard with Newrow. Teacher onboarding and coaching could be improved. Financial, audit and compliance services duplicate what the school itself already does. It makes sense to bring the three K12 on site employees onto MEVA's own payroll and to clarify what other services belong in which category and allow MEVA to buy only what is needed at a negotiated price.

MEVA could provide its own in house training for new teachers, do the K12 introduction and then prepare formal MEVA support sessions.

Enrollment & Course Data. Middle school enrollment has gradually increased from 19% of the total in 2017 to 30% in 2020. About 55% of all students are economically disadvantaged and 15% qualify for Special Ed.

Graduation, College & Career Readiness.

MEVA's graduates have been enrolled in the school on average for only 2.1 years. In comparison with five other charter schools, this is the least amount of time for continuous school participation before graduation. The average for all six schools is 3.1 years.

84% of MEVA graduates are economically disadvantaged which is dramatically higher than the 42% average for all Maine public schools and the 57% average for the 6 Maine charter schools for which data was aggregated. Schools like MEVA with a higher number of economically disadvantaged students have lower graduation rates. MEVA's graduation rate is 60% which is the second lowest among the six charter schools in the comparison study. From 2018 to 2019, MEVA's graduation rate increased from 49% to 60% which was a greater rate of increase than any of the other five charters. The state graduation rate for all public schools is 87%. Among the six charters studied, only Baxter and MEAA exceed this rate.

Lisa made several recommendations to improve college and career readiness:

- Improve laboratory science options and encourage students to take at least two courses from among biology, chemistry, and physics.
- Develop a MeVA-taught foreign language option for interested students.
- Advise students on developing career interests and skills starting in middle school. Provide access to more high school Career and Technical Education (CTE) courses.

Upon motion by Amy, seconded by Peter, Lisa's Third Party Evaluation Report was approved.

Legislative Report. Bill Ferdinand said that Democrats lost ground in the House but gained a little in the Senate. Ryan Fecteau is Speaker. Michelle Dunphy is House Majority Leader. Rachel Talbot Ross is Assistant. Kathleen Dillingham is House GOP Minority Leader. Joel Stetkis is Assistant.

Troy Jackson is Senate President. Nate Libby is Majority Leader. Eloise Vitelli is Assistant. The GOP Minority Leader is Jeff Timberlake. The Assistant is Matthew Pouliot.

Education Committee members include Dave Woodsum, a former teacher from Sanford with previous service on Utilities. Maddie Daughtry from Brunswick is Senate Chair. Joe Rafferty from Kennebunk has the second Senate seat for the Democrats. Mike Brennan from Portland is House Chair. Ed Crockett, Rebecca Millette and Paul Stern, a former superintendent, are also members.

At some point, we should suggest lifting the 1000 student statutory enrollment limit for virtual academies. People are disturbed about the failure of brick and mortar schools to provide competent virtual education. We should communicate how important it is to achieve and maintain competence in distant learning. Parental coaching is a crucial ingredient. Virtual education is not easy. But Maine's two virtual charter schools have learned how to do it.

The budget deficit is projected at \$600 million for the biennium but it may become more manageable as the economy recovers. Education money is the largest budget item. In regard to charter school funding, it is important to point out that we already do not receive the full state share. Donna Bailey and Paul Davis are serving on Appropriations.

Financial report. Jennifer said that the audit is being reviewed and should be ready to present to the board at the next meeting. The 990 is on extension until May.

MEVA's loss for last year was \$226 thousand. We are aiming to break even for next year. We have ordered far fewer materials from K12 for the coming year. Special coaching was also cut.

Some of our Covid money was used to for cleaning costs which were very high. Covid accounting created a huge burden for DOE. The funds were carefully controlled and audited by the feds.

Upon motion by Peter, seconded by Donna, the financial package and presentation were approved,

Head of School Report. MEVA's chronic absenteeism rate is at 8.9%, still under 10%. This is a big improvement over several years ago. Our next recording date is mid-January for the second quarter results which should be similar. Mehry and others have kept a focus on this issue. It has helped our retention rate. Last year at this time we had lost 37 students. This year we have lost 19 even though our total count has gone up from 396 to 430. Three of our withdrawals were from a single family that moved to Florida. Because move aways don't count, we have only 16 withdrawals since October 1, and our retention rate is 96%.

We are holding meetings with families all day, every day. High school retention is also strong. Those who leave do so because they miss their friends at the former school. We need to make sure they find friends in MEVA.

We are running classes on December 23 and will start up again on January 4. First semester ends on January 11. The new semester starts January 15.

NWEA assessments will be administered on January 12, 13, and 14. NWEAs are for grades 7 through 11. We had 96% participation last time. Some students take too long on their NWEAs.

The Commission recommends giving NWEA's three times per year. It is considered a local assessment. Donna pointed out that because state assessments will not be given this year it is good to do three NWEAs.

We propose to pay teachers at an hourly rate for what they do for vacation camp. It is a great opportunity to bring students along and Covid money can be used for this. Amy agreed that vacation camps are a great idea. Thanks to the instructors who are dedicated to using this time for this purpose.

Management issues. Peter reported that as a result of a two hour review on December 9, it is fair to conclude that the Admin Services component of our contract with K12 should be dissolved and the service fee eliminated. Some of the reasons are described in the Third Party Evaluation Report. Many of the listed services overlap with the basic services agreement. Other functions such as finance and compliance have to be done by MEVA. K12's efforts are redundant. The three K12 employees who work out of the MEVA office can just as well be put on MEVA's payroll and K12's charges for their services be eliminated. It is important to advertise now for a financial administrator who can join us this winter with a view toward taking over much of Jenn's work by the time the new school year starts up in mid-summer.

We need to engage with K12 to amend the contract effective August 1, 2021.

At 3:45 PM upon motion by Amy, seconded by Donna, the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Peter Mills, Secretary