

## Maine Learning Innovations

Minutes for a Meeting of the Board of Directors held January 15, 2019

Pursuant to email and public website notices, a meeting of the Board of Maine Learning Innovations was convened at 2:00 PM on January 15, 2019, in the Maine Virtual Academy offices in Augusta. Members attending in person were Peter Mills, Ed Leblanc and Donna Madore. Amy Carlisle was excused.

Also attending in person were Melinda Browne, Chelsea Osgood (Junior High Social Studies), Fadia Afaneh, Patti Ashley from K12 accounting, Jennifer Hight and Jillian Dearborn. On the phone were Erica Seybert from K12 and Sarah Butler Jessen, independent evaluator.

**Report of Independent Evaluator.** Sarah Butler Jessen provided an oral summary of her report while taking questions and comments.

In some sense, we appear to be running an alternative school. We have substantial absenteeism that increases by grade level. We have a high drop out rate and a low graduation rate. We are connecting well with some students but many are not connecting. Part of this is self-selection by students in the sense that students may be using virtual enrollment as an escape. Sarah suggests that there may be increasing disengagement for some students as they move through the grades.

She noted a variety of issues having to do with the challenge of adapting to inflexible programs from K12. There are challenges in making MEVA's own identity in its relationship to K12. The teachers lack clarity on decision making structure perhaps caused by the layers of oversight by K12, the Commission and the Board, leading to confusion on policies.

Teachers expressed concerns about grading and completion. In the interest of providing flexibility, there are no consequences for a student's failure to do work on time. This tends to swamp teachers at the end of the semester and raises questions about how to get students to complete their courses. Many are on track to fail. Discussion often makes it clear that assignments may be dropped from requirements to facilitate passing the course.

Test performance is below average, particularly the MEAs. The majority are well below basic in math and reading. Looking at the NWEA scores to measure growth shows that students are just making observed growth in most areas. Only a small number are doing better. The majority are not making their individual targets. Some have large gaps. Those making it are doing so in only small increments.

There is a need for more support and alternative education models. There are major challenges in regard to attendance and outcomes.

Peter suggested that we increase the teacher student ratio in order to provide more individualized support to students. Many of these students come to us in need of alternative school treatment, yet we are not well equipped to provide such services.

Sarah distinguished between negative and positive choice making. Negative choice is choosing a new school in order to depart from an unpleasant experience. Positive choice is finding a school with new opportunities. Many parents and students seem to have chosen MEVA as a way to escape from an unpleasant school environment.

Many students chose MEVA to obtain flexible scheduling. Others just wanted out from bullying. Access to better courses is only wanted by a few. As scheduling becomes less flexible, parents may be less interested in staying. Those who are former home schoolers prefer flexibility. On the other hand, MEVA's teachers are pleased with the new fixed instruction times and required attendance. Perhaps the solution is to allow flexible attendance only for those for whom it is justified.

Melinda said that it is primarily juniors and seniors who are delaying their course completion work until the end.

Jillian pointed out that Mary and Lizzie have done strong intervention work to the point where some students who refuse to reengage are driven out.

Chelsea said that the teachers really like the every day course schedule for junior high students. Melinda said that for high school students the schedule is three times a week for math and English plus small groups. For Social Studies, it is two times a week and three for science including one lab.

Chelsea said that in order to help her junior high students who cannot read well, she has recorded her reading of the entire Social Studies text for them to listen to. She pointed out that the teachers have a more manageable load this year than last. Last year, she had 200 students and this year 100.

**Minutes.** Upon motion by Donna, seconded by Ed, the minutes for December 11, 2018, were approved.

**Finance.** Patti Ashley presented a nice series of tables clearly illustrating our present finances. Jennifer said that because the payment rate for each student is based on the cost of the sending district, our ED 239 runs to several pages with a different figure based on where each student originates from. In advance of receiving the ED 239, it is difficult to know what total revenue will be for the year.

Our landlord has offered to rent three finished spaces on the second floor to expand the number of teaching areas that we have. Upon motion by Donna, seconded by Peter, it was agreed to rent the additional space as necessary to serve any teachers who wish to occupy it.

We are frequently running over our copy limits on the copier we have rented from Transco since the school was opened. Jillian will see what she can do to improve the lease.

Upon motion by Donna, seconded by Peter, the finance reports were approved.

Upon motion by Donna, seconded by Ed, we voted to approve hiring a new Math and Title teacher recently interviewed by Melinda.

At 4:00 PM the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Peter Mills, Secretary