

Maine Learning Innovations

Minutes for a Meeting of the Board of Directors held October 22, 2024

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, October 22nd, 2024. Board members attending were Donna Pelletier, Stacey Blanchard, Cherieann Harrison, Tina Meserve, and Susan Walters. A quorum was present.

Attending from Maine Virtual Academy (MEVA) were Melinda Browne, Don Fournier, Christina O'Grady, Lena Vitagliano, Chelsea Osgood, Nicole Taylor, Jillian Dearborn, Jennifer Hight, Stephanie Emery, Dan Pierce, and Heather Tyler.

Opening Items.

Approval of Minutes. Tina motioned to approve the minutes of the Maine Virtual Academy (MEVA) Governing Board Business Meeting of September 17th, 2024. Cherieann seconded. All in favor, so moved.

Finance Report.

The FY24 Audit is going well. Jennifer Hight stated that we have a new team of auditors. The person from last year started the preliminary audit but then left the firm. This year, the auditors have an online portal to upload everything they need. Jennifer reported that we had most of their checklist accomplished. Additionally, there was a more expensive single audit for the federal relief funds. Jennifer projected this should be completed by the end of December.

Donna asked how the FY25 budget was currently going. Jennifer advises that the financials looked good. Nothing appeared surprising outside of health insurance expenses, but we had put aside funds that.

Jennifer reported that we had been getting covid money reimbursements. \$260k funding remained at the end of summer. She suggested that we did not waste the money; we only purchased items MEVA truly needed. Dr. Browne observed that we set ourselves up well in comparison to what other schools are experiencing right now.

Tina said to Jen that she was thankful to her in being on time with the submissions to the auditors. Tina stated if our auditor were behind, then we may have to put pressure behind that. Tina said that she has had bad experiences in the past, and if we were able to get our work completed on time, then they should also do the same for us.

Jennifer made the point that the auditor did not say they would be late. Jennifer also mentioned that we were fortunate to have an auditor, in comparison to others who were having trouble obtaining one due to limited staffing in the accounting world. Jennifer committed to emailing and checking in with them.

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

SY-2023/2024 Annual Monitoring Report:

- MEVA is meeting/exceeding most performance measures.
- Math Proficiency is the area of focus for future improvement.

- MEVA's strategic goal addresses our math proficiency need.

SY-2024/2025 Progress:

- Curriculum Mapping.
- Maine Through Year (MTY) Participation:
 - 171 Math = 92.43%.
 - 170 Reading = 91.89%.
 - If ALL but 7 Test – Participation *Projection* is:
 - Math - 96.21%.
 - (All but 8) Reading – 95.67%.
- Mid-Year Enrollment Window Opens on 11/1.

Live Core Course Students and Staffing:

- We review course enrollment data continuously.
- Typical MEVA general education live core content courses have fewer than fifty students.
- Multiple sections apply to all our larger courses.
- We distribute support faculty in accordance with need to minimize student-teacher ratios.
- Fall '24 Live Core Course Counts.
- Split sections to accommodate schedules – reduces class size.
- At least two faculty per course for all except small classes.

Tina requested the self-paced counts for the board to view. Tina said this information would be helpful when we are discussing future staffing plans and other things. Donna asks clarity regarding the teacher counts.

Dr. Browne mentioned that math courses are combined with self-paced and live attendees. Teachers made this choice within the math department, but since had committed to separating the courses going forward. Board members expressed or nodded in agreement that the differentiation between the two is best.

Charter Contract Renewal Progress:

- The Maine Charter School Commission (MCSC) voted, unanimously in favor, at their October business meeting.
- The MCSC renewed MEVA for a 5-year charter contract that begins on July 1st, 2025.

Nicole Taylor, MS Math Teacher, presented her literacy grant. The MS English/Math departments collaborated on unpacking the literacy standards with math objectives. Nicole shared their progress and development. They created math vocabulary flash cards with visuals. We built these into the content, and within each unit. Nicole reported that they were also incorporating written responses and critical thinking questions within the content. This gives more insight into the student and seeing if they are understanding the content.

Students will have to break down each step and the thought process, explaining what the words mean.

We are incorporating real-life applications. The MS team is still exploring additional ideas such as creating project-based learning content, allowing students to be creative.

Donna expressed that she loved the presentation, and stated it was always inspiring to see teachers that are enthusiastic about their work.

Dr. Browne made the point that Nicole gets high growth with her students and is an exceptionally talented teacher.

SY-2024/2025 Preliminary Enrollment (Oct. 1st, 2024):

- *Prior Year in ()s.*

- **Total = 475** (442). Our current count is 5.6% above cap (450 students). MEVA is permitted to enroll up to 10% above cap or 495 students.
- **SE = 117, 24.6%** (113, 24.6%).
- **ED = 218, 45.9%** (239, 54.1%).
- **EL = 3** (2).
- Current Year counts are uncertified and are subject to change.

Economic Disadvantage is slightly lower this year so far, but forms are still coming in.

Cherieann inquired about the 'EL' acronym on the last slide and what it meant? Dr. Browne replied that 'EL' stands for English Learner.

Governance.

Updated Employee Handbook:

Dr. Browne sent the updated draft employee handbook out to faculty and asked for feedback. No one provided any additional comments regarding the new policies. Dr. Browne said that the only comments surrounded the return of MEVA equipment. Dr. Browne said we strengthened the policy in that area for clarification purposes.

Tina questioned the Intellectual Property (IP) form. Tina said that the policy made sense and was standard across businesses/organizations. She observed that the disclosure form portion was long and intrusive for Individuals doing something outside of MEVA's time. Specifically, the questions were associated with detailed plans about their sales, etc.

Dr. Browne stated that the questions came from the higher-ed sample she used. Dr. Browne further mentioned, we were not saying to people that they can't sell or publish their work. We are asking that they disclose their plans. If they were not using school resources, then the form (likely) did not apply. Dr. Browne said the concern was that MEVA asked people to create content as part of their job. If they wanted to use school data, then they need to get permission to do so. Dr. Browne stated we were not saying they could not sell or publish. We just needed to be aware of what was going on.

Donna said that individuals need to be aware that the policy provides information, should the staff disagree with the Head of School's decision on the form, they can appeal it to the board.

Susan inquired for clarity, what you are asking is that if they do research and use school data, they need to make sure they document that this came from MEVA. We are not asking for kickbacks. Dr. Browne stated, no we were not asking for kickbacks. Dr. Browne said that her fear was if one person gained success from a publication or product using things developed for or at the school, others could dispute it by saying they had a collaborative part in the creation of that item.

Tina motioned to approve the updated MEVA Employee Handbook. Susan seconded. All in favor, so moved.

Employee Health Insurance Discussion:

Jillian shared that Anthem did propose a 21% increase for the renewal, due to high claims. Claims this year were slightly lower, but still show over 100% loss ratio for Anthem. Three to four (3-4) claims this year drove up cost, but there was nothing we could do as it did affect the rates. Clark Insurance was shopping around and was hoping to find better rates/options. There was no change or increase with vision however, dental was going up 4%.

Jillian reported that before the November board meeting, MEVA would send quotes to the board. Jillian clarified open enrollment begins in early December and closes at the end of December right before the break.

Given that the rate increase started in January, Tina asked how much is 21% and did we have a buffer in the budget for this? Donna recalled in the past; didn't we ask if they could come into our fiscal year? Jillian stated that the cycle changed because people would get upset due to the insurance deductibles resetting in January. We built a buffer to cover the budget.

Jennifer said we budgeted about where our premiums were landing. We budgeted \$42k per month. Our portion on the September bill was \$38k.

Cherieann asked how much the increase was last year. Jillian explained the reason for the increases were twofold, we went from small to large market which drove the biggest increase, along with the high claims. Tina asked if we could make comparisons from prior years to the current year, to help in developing a budget. Jennifer committed to gathering that info.

Facilities Lease Renewal Discussion:

Dr. Browne reported that the lease is up, concurrent to our charter renewal, on June 30th, 2025. Dr. Browne said that she will share the quote with the board when we get it. We are happy with the space, and we would like to keep it. Dr. Browne also understands if the board wanted to go in another direction.

Donna said that she hoped we can get a quote soon. Jillian made the point that Ballard Center management did not share the proposed lease information until after the new year. Donna requested the information before we prepared the FY26 budget.

As a follow up to Independent Third-Party Report Recommendation about incorporating virtual peer interactions, Heather Tyler and Dan Pierce, Guidance Counselors, presented their efforts and ideas.

Dan shared the current options at MEVA:

- Morning Assembly.
 - Whole school morning announcements, fun facts, and more.
 - Community-building time for all students.
 - The chat is open throughout assembly for students to comment and interact.
 - Advisory.
 - More options for small group interactions.
 - Gives students time with the advisory teachers and students to focus on important topics (career exploration, post-secondary skills, 21st century thinking skills, citizenship, and more.) and dig deeper into positive interactions with peers and staff at MEVA.
- Help Desk.
 - Students can work together in small groups.
 - Students talk together about questions they have with one another and work through problems together.
- Clubs:
 - ASL.
 - Animal/Bird Club.
 - Anime.
 - Art/Photography.
 - Book/Reading.
 - Chess.
 - Gaming.
 - National Honor Society.

- Prodigy (math).

Heather made the point that outside of MEVA walls there were community opportunities we presented to students. These included band, chorus, sports, Career Technical Education (CTE) programs, external credit, volunteering, working and various other activities. We encouraged kids to continue these positive activities and relationships.

Heather shared the next steps to build on: We are looking at transition needs for seventh graders going from elementary to middle school level. We are looking to develop a resource list by county of in-person community opportunities for grades 7-12. Additionally, we are looking at developing a (monitored) virtual lunchroom. We are currently in the planning process with this.

Donna said she liked the virtual lunchroom idea – that will be interesting to observe.

Public Discussion.

Dr. Browne thanked everyone for their support. Donna expressed a congrats to all staff on the charter contract renewal.

Adjournment.

Susan motioned to adjourn. Cherieann seconded. So moved by Donna. The meeting was adjourned at 4:15 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Stephanie Emery and Dr. Melinda Browne
Secretary pro tempore