

Maine Learning Innovations

Minutes for a Meeting of the Board of Directors held November 19, 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, November 19th, 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, Athony Barletta, Jillian Dearborn, Jennifer Hight, and Stephanie Emery.

Attending from Stride was Tom Travia.

Attending from Clark Insurance was David Hamilton.

Opening Items.

Approval of Minutes. Tina motioned to approve the minutes of the Maine Virtual Academy (MEVA) Governing Board Business Meeting of October 22nd, 2024. Stacey seconded. All in favor, so moved.

Finance Report. Jennifer Hight, CPA, presented the Finance Report.

FY24-25 Quarter 1 Financial Summary: MEVA shows a surplus of \$463,662 for the three months ended September 30, 2024. We have utilized \$204,022 in ESSER III revenue for this quarter. These funds were used mainly to pay for summer school salaries and benefits for learning loss recovery, guidance services and, and purchased technology equipment. Salaries and benefits remain our largest expense. As of September 30th, we had 61 employees made up of 12.5 Administrative positions and 48.5 Teachers/Ed-Techs. Our financial audit of FY'23-24 is currently being conducted by Wipfli and we do not anticipate any delay in completion.

Discussion: The FY25 Quarter-1 Financials have been sent to the Maine Charter School Commission (MCSC). Jennifer stated we will only have \$100K left of the (ESSER funds) unused. Jennifer addressed not getting the money from all the invoices that have been submitted and approved of the \$40k grant. Jennifer addressed it with the state; they were apologetic due to lots of staff turnover in the department.

Donna asked which fiscal year was this \$40K grant for? Jennifer said this was for 23-24. Dr. Browne iterated this was the innovative, interdisciplinary, project-based learning grant that MEVA had been awarded for that year that funded a science teacher. Tina asked if the \$40K had all been spent? Jennifer said, yes. Tina was concerned from the auditors' standpoint about not having any of the funds reimbursed. Jennifer stated they did ask if MEVA had received any money. She has let the auditors know that nothing has come in yet. MEVA was not the only school having this payment issue. There were a lot of issues within the state, which resulted in them not getting paid in a timely manner. Jennifer and Dr. Browne reported that the IDEA Year-End report was still not available for completion in Grants4ME.

Cherieann asked when the close date was for ESSER. Jennifer and Dr. Browne stated it was closed on September 30th. Jennifer and Dr. Browne stated that the preventing-student-homelessness grant performance report was complete, and they were waiting for the school-improvement grant performance report to become available.

Cherieann motioned to approve the FY25 Quarter-1 Financials. Stacey seconded. All in favor, so moved.

Regarding the FY24 Audit, Jennifer stated, she emailed Kelsey (the auditor) last week and checked in to see if we owed anything else; they said not at this time. Jennifer was going to keep reviewing and looking things over in the meantime. She will wait another week and check in with the auditor again to see if there is any additional progress.

Dr. Browne asked if the auditor knew when the board meeting was in December, since their presentation will be on the agenda. Jennifer committed to reaching out and providing that info to the auditors.

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

- MEVA stays focused on accomplishing our two strategic goals in math proficiency and reading growth by collecting, analyzing, and sharing assessment data at our weekly process improvement meeting, bi-weekly department and grade-level meetings, and individual/small-group team meetings with teachers and support teachers.
- Our curriculum mapping project is making great progress, and we expect to share/discuss grade-7 core-content maps in December.
- The MEVA National Honor Society Chapter is inducting nine (9) new members this week.

Fall 2023-Fall 2024 NWEA MAP GROWTH – Reading:

- Overall, our growth from fall to fall in Reading was 52.1%.
- The lowest growth was 8th Grade (3/13). This grade also had the least amount of returning students (7th Graders in 2023-2024).
- The highest growth was 9th Grade (28/44). These are students who were in 8th Grade in 2023-2024 and are 9th graders this year.

Fall '24 Grade Level	% of Students Who Met Projected (Fall '23 to Fall '24) Growth
8 th Grade	23.1%
9 th Grade	63.6%
10 th Grade	53.7%
11 th Grade	48.2%
Overall	52.1%

Math Proficiency Projections:

Maine Through Year Math Proficiency Projection – Fall '24

Math proficiency projection based on % of students < 60th percentile.

Math								
	Total # Students	Total Projected At	% Projected At (61st-80th)	Total Projected Above	% Projected Above (81st-99th)	% Proj. At & Above	MTY 2024	Difference
7th Grade	38	8	21.05%	2	5.26%	26.32%	38.00%	-11.68%
8th Grade	28	5	17.86%	1	3.57%	21.43%	39.00%	-17.57%
High School	110	13	11.82%	16	14.55%	26.36%	42.00%	-15.64%

Fall '24 I-Ready Math Proficiency Projection

Math										
	Total # Students	Total # Tested	% Tested	Total Projected At	% Projected At (61st-80th)	Total Projected Above	% Projected Above (81st-99th)	% Proj. At & Above	MTY 2024	Difference
7th Grade	38	31	81.58%	17	44.74%	0	0.00%	44.74%	38.00%	6.74%
8th Grade	28	18	64.29%	7	25.00%	0	0.00%	25.00%	39.00%	-14.00%
High School	110	90	81.82%	30	27.27%	6	5.45%	32.73%	42.00%	-9.27%

Discussion: Dr. Browne reported that the expanded curriculum mapping project will be shared for grade 7 at the December board meeting. The Winter NWEA MAP Growth is coming up, January 14, 15, and 16. Dr. Browne said we have work to do in math instruction to improve students' proficiency. However, the NWEA MAP Math growth was strong. The i-Ready algebra assessment was a good measure of students' proficiency. MEVA was starting to implement this instrument. We were learning how to use it, and expected to increase participation in future administration, which factors into our Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS). At the scheduled, upcoming, mid-year check-in meeting, the MCSC only wants to hear about the performance measures the school needs to work on, at this point going forward.

Teacher Presentation - Anthony Barletta, MEVA Biology teacher; he was involved with the literacy grant project. Anthony explained that they divided the work into two parts. The team first looked at what the goals

were to promote literacy and break down the standards. The second part focused specifically on the course itself. We focused on coherent writing in which the development, organization and style are appropriate to the task, audience, and purpose. This is so students can compose writing that is organized and coherent also accurately describe the purpose of the content.

Donna asked about the accordion vocabulary feature, if the students provided any feedback on this? Anthony mentioned there were things for them to get used to and that he was cognizant about pushing out this vocabulary feature more frequently. Donna made the point that it was a new tool, which the students were getting used to, and it would take time. Cherieann said she liked the way Anthony was showing the students how to learn; sometimes we forgot to do that. Stacey agreed that the students really liked Anthony's teaching style and "brain breaks" during his live sessions.

Dr. Browne reported that MEVA also had a National Honor Society (NHS) Chapter, and we were inducting nine new members this week. Donna asked if there was a student cap for the NHS? Dr. Browne said she was not sure about a cap, but we inducted approximately a dozen students each school year. The NHS was based on students' applications and selection by our committee.

Enrollment Update:

- We are recruiting students for mid-year. These students will complete the Winter '25 NWEAs.
- Reregistration for currently enrolled families begins in late February.
- We open the window for new SY-2025/2026 enrollments on January 27, 2025, with a (possible) lottery on March 20th, 2025. We always post notice of the open enrollment in the Kennebec Journal and on our websites.

Dr. Browne said that MEVA usually shines during re-registration and families tend to make their decision very quickly.

Governance.

Employee Health Insurance Options Discussion: David Hamilton of Clark Insurance stated that all insurance companies (besides Anthem) declined to quote except for Cigna, which is competitive. The Anthem renewal showed three plan options - there was a slight rate increase (21 percent approximately) due to the loss-ratio calculation. No major plan changes with Anthem. There was an alternative package available, but it did not really save that much money. The alternative plan would increase the deductible from \$1,500 to \$2,500 as an example. You can implement the Health Reimbursement Account (HRA) threshold so that the coverage is closer to the original plan. The only other option to look at would be Cigna.

David reported that Cigna tried to match the plan design to the Anthem plan design. There were some areas that can be adjusted if desired.

Cigna plan 1 is only a 5.5% increase, plan 2 is a 20.66% increase, which is lower than the Anthem renewal on this plan. Plan 3 - HSA plan would be a 7.41% increase. In the premium-to-premium comparison, plan 3 would be a larger savings. Cigna agreed to allocate \$35,000 administrative credit, which will be applied to either the first or second invoice. The credit could be applied to a rainy-day fund or allocated across members. It was up to MEVA to determine that. Additionally, a \$5,000 wellness fund would be included that could be provided to staff in the form of webinars, or other creative wellness related programs. Cigna did not include vision in their medical plan. Jillian made the point that MEVA already has VSP for vision anyway. David said most medial insurances have moved away from vision coverage. He stated that it was good that MEVA has a plan already

for vision coverage. David discussed further the self-pay open access plus program, which was designed to be built out to a maximum rate, in the event of a high claim. This was beneficial if claims dropped, then the money was refunded to the school to do whatever they need to do. Unfortunately, with the self-pay feature, Cigna does not cover IVF treatments and hearing aids for adults even though the state mandated these within insurance coverage. Jillian asked where we would be percent wise with Cigna across plans blended. David - stated it was based on which plan MEVA selected in comparison to the renewal plan. The blended percentage was 8-9% across plans if everyone kept their current plan. David said there were always going to be variables.

Tina confirmed that MEVA pays 100% of the insurance for employees. However, the employee contribution was only for their dependents.

Chelsea (teacher) asked about the Cigna HMO plan, why Anthem has a tiered plan versus Cigna's flat rate HMO? David stated that Cigna was more beneficial due to the deductibles that could be applied to any hospital, it did not change.

Donna inquired about the overall comparison between companies. Anthem is \$744K for renewal. Cigna is 664k with 70k credit and 35k savings. The concern for the board was that the board received the info very late and had to make decisions quickly, so it made it difficult. Jennifer stated we did not budget enough; we put aside \$504K for insurance. Donna- expressed concerns; we did not expect the 21% increase, but we do understand it. We also want to be mindful about not taking things away from the teachers. The board needed timely renewal info.

Jennifer highlighted the other struggle with the timeframes; we had renewal every year at this time, and it was tough. However, we did not change the timing due to employees' deductibles. David made the point that we could have a renewal date that aligned with the fiscal year. Some carriers allowed clients to match the deductible to the plan year. Most plans were for the calendar year regardless of renewal date. The deductible was only going to run calendar year, it may not be a big deal if you stayed with the same carrier. If you changed carriers, the old carrier had to send deductible credit, but some carriers did not do that. Jillian asserted that employees had issues with fiscal year renewal. which is why the insurance deadlines were set to the current schedule. Tina observed that most schools need to have insurance information ahead for budgeting purposes, which takes precedence. It was annoying but this was a big fiscal issue for the school; it was good we have money to absorb it this time.

David understood the board frustrations. He mentioned that the response from the carriers was extremely slow, because the numbers were difficult. New carriers must have a minimum of nine months of claims data to make decisions. We tried to get the renewals out to the school as fast as we can.

Donna made the point that she did not like changing insurance-carriers or programs within a school year. Changing things that impacted the teachers was not good practice. Donna asked the board to consider at a future meeting how we wanted to do this if we decided to go to fiscal year versus annual determinations going forward. On the current year budget, we are now \$160K short, but thankfully we have the money to cover it at this point.

Jennifer suggested considering not paying the entire premium going forward. Donna said the board will need to have a meeting to discuss financial impacts. David said all companies were impacted by rate increases. Tina observed that teachers who were retiring must be covered by Anthem Blue Cross for a few years prior to retirement. Jillian said the state did not allow charter school employees to be a part of the school retirement and medical plan/programs they ran. Dr. Browne pointed out Cigna would be less expensive for dependent coverage. Jillian said the plan options (Anthem and Cigna) were very comparable; budget wise it made sense to go with Cigna.

Donna said it was difficult to change without giving staff notice, understanding the savings going with Cigna. However, she preferred to let teachers know about the change and to allow teachers to decide if they wanted to come back to MEVA next school year with full knowledge of the changes. Jennifer stated we would have to make cuts.

Jillian said we gave an open enrollment window. Health insurance changed on January 1st. David said it depended on the carrier MEVA renewed with: You can renew with Anthem for January 1st, then in April or early May, you can decide to change to Cigna starting on July 1st - it can be done, off-cycle rewrite with Anthem then move to a different carrier. David presented the option of going through the exercise to determine if the figures add up. If claims went down, we could appeal to more options down the road - it can be done, but there were a lot that factored into the adjustment. Cherieann expressed her concern about changing insurance companies at this time, as it may impact employees who may want IVF services. We needed to look more at staff needs than the budget.

Stacey asked about forecasting future health insurance premium increases. Stacey reiterated that David said this could have been much worse. David stated on average, trends had been running 10-12% increases on a good year. Most increases are in the 15% to 20% range. David recommended budgeting for this increase next year and going forward.

Tina made the point that we do not want to impact employees in any way if we can prevent it. From what Dr. Browne was saying, if we have six people paying for children, they will be paying a lot more versus one person being impacted by the change in insurance- carriers. Right now, I would vote on staying the same, however, the change will impact everyone in some way. Either way someone will be impacted, both the organization and the staff. Dr. Browne observed that the most comments we get are from the teachers with children. Few employees from other groups vocalize concerns, it is the people with children that feel the hit of the increases.

The board had a lot of questions about David's presentation moving forward. Donna looked for a motion to recommend either Anthem or Cigna.

Tina motioned to continue providing the Anthem health insurance plans for the coming year. Stacey seconded. All in favor, so moved.

Donna said the board will further discuss when to put this on the agenda for the next renewal cycle.

David asserted that Clark Insurance was still waiting for an answer (from the carriers) on ways to reduce costs. He will keep the board posted. Jillian asked David to be prepped for Monday's staff meeting presentation on the continuance with Anthem. The board committed to reviewing all this again in the next few months to decide on future plans. This way they would inform teachers in advance so that they know what they are coming back into the next school year.

Dr. Browne presented the SY-2025/2026 Calendar:

- 180 Instructional Days.
- 190 Teacher Days.
- August 25th, 2025 – First Day.
- June 12th, 2026 – Last Day.
- MEVA does not have snow days.
- June 22nd, 2026, to August 7th, 2026 – Summer Session.

Dr. Browne made the point that the proposed calendar mirrors prior school years.

Tina motioned to approve the SY-2025/2026 Calendar. Susan seconded. All in favor, so moved.

Dr. Browne presented the final ESSER compliance review:

- ESSER Continuity of Education Plan.
- ESSER Use of Funds Plan.
- Documented Review every six months (e.g., May and November).
- Both Plans and Last Review Date Posted on the MEVA websites.
- Final ESSER Performance Report will likely be due in March 2025.

Reviewed ARP (ESSER III) Use of Funds Plan for Maine Virtual Academy (MEVA):

Utilizing meaningful consultation with stakeholders, MEVA developed the following three priorities for the use of ARP ESSER funds. These priorities provide/facilitate:

- Data-driven, targeted instruction/interventions by co-teaching teams to address students' achievement gaps.
- Students' college/career readiness.
- Functional/social/emotional support for students and strong communications with families.
- MEVA's reservation to address the impact of lost instructional time will be utilized for the following evidence-based interventions:
 - Summer Programming.
 - Class-Size Reduction.

The remaining ARP ESSER Funds will support projects focusing on expanding/improving:

- School Counseling and Related Services.
- Facilities (Safety).
- Educational Technology.
- Family Communications.

Reviewed ARP (ESSER III) Continuity of Education Plan for Maine Virtual Academy (MEVA):

- MEVA is continuing its remote learning model in accordance with our mission and vision. MEVA is providing our teachers with two weeks of professional development/preparation prior to the first day of school.
- MEVA is communicating with families via emails, newsletters, and onboarding sessions. There are no changes to students' and families' experiences within their academic schedules, because of the pandemic (COVID-19).
- MEVA is expanding its remote instructional model to the summer for tutoring and credit recovery courses. The summer session addresses students' learning losses through targeted skills development informed by course grades and assessments. The school calendar includes the Summer Session dates.
- As usual, MEVA is administering the fall NWEAs, math, reading and language usage sections, during September, to establish an academic baseline for our students in grades 7 – 11. MEVA also plans to administer the NWEAs during the Winter in January, and Spring in May, as scheduled.
- For grade 12 students, seniors, MEVA will assess their progress towards graduation and postsecondary plans on an individual basis during the early fall and provide interventions as needed.
- MEVA administers school climate surveys to students, parents, teachers, and staff throughout the school year. The data informs our continuous school improvement efforts.

Public Discussion.

Cherieann proposed a change to board meeting times. She stated that 3:00 pm was difficult for her since she was working on west coast time. If possible, she is asking to adjust board meeting times to 4:00 pm Eastern Time going forward. Tina said that she preferred evenings. Stacey agreed. Susan was okay with the proposed change to 4:00 pm and asked about the impact on staff that attended regularly. Tina made the point that we needed to prioritize the board's needs rather than staff needs for these meetings. Donna decided that the board would move forward with changing the board meetings to 4:00 pm and Dr. Browne will update the website to suit. The December board meeting will begin at 4:00 pm.

Dr. Browne shared a slide with individual board members' training assignments for SY-2024/2025, which were due by June 30th, 2025. Donna mentions that she was counting on members to stay on top of board training going forward.

Adjournment.

Donna adjourned the meeting at 4:54 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Stephanie Emery and Dr. Melinda Browne
Secretary pro tempore