

To: Commissioners, Maine Charter School Commission
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HCA Update on start of the 2016-17 School Year

As you know, HCA was faced with challenges at the beginning of the school year with regard to our facility at Brunswick Landing for our Division 2 & 3 students. We were also faced with a challenge regarding our use of MFSAB vehicles. Though these challenges led to a different start of the school year than we had anticipated, we are very happy with how things are going, and want to take an opportunity to give you an update on the year to date.

Facilities & impact on Academic Program:

We are happy to report that we've been able to reach agreement among state and local fire and building code folks for modifications to our new Division 2/3 building at 8 Leavitt Drive at Brunswick Landing. Our architect, Andrew Munsey of Knickerbocker Group in Boothbay, is preparing plans in collaboration with the building owners, Doug and Mike Cardente of Cardente Real Estate Group. The current estimate is for a late October/early November move in date.

As anyone who has seen the space can attest, our new home - formerly the Navy's SERE School - is in excellent shape, with the previous tenant having updated all the systems less than 2 years ago. Nevertheless, the building and fire codes contain an enormous amount of very specific guidelines for schools, requiring us to add several exits, re-position some interior walls, add bathroom capacity and add sprinklers in an un-sprinkled section. The work cannot begin until the plans are formally approved at both state and town level - those processes are underway, but cannot be sped up.

In the meantime, our students and teachers are doing an extraordinary job with our temporary arrangements, utilizing space at the Brunswick Landing YMCA, MRRRA's Community Room, Cardente Group's 4 Leavitt Drive building, and outside spaces at SMCC and Seeds of Independence, as well as the large room at 8 Leavitt Drive that already meets code requirements. We are deeply indebted to the folks who've made these spaces available to ensure that our learning experiences can be undertaken with a minimum of disruption.

Our day to day schedule currently involves all students starting and ending the day utilizing a large space in the Brunswick Landing YMCA. From the morning meeting, students depart for one of the areas identified above for learning experiences that include math, science and english instruction. We gather again for lunch, provided at Division 2/3 this year by the New Beet Cafe, and then separate for afternoon Investigation periods. Our faculty have developed investigations that can be completed on the Brunswick Landing campus. These investigations include Fundamentals of Creativity, HCA TV, Building, Elections,

PBL Math, Theater, Sustainability, Field Recordings, and Witches, Inequality, Puritanism, & Mania in the Early American Colonies.

After Investigations sessions, students gather together for Wellness opportunities. In addition to utilizing the Brunswick Landing YMCA at this time, students are playing disc golf and volleyball, and taking walks through the acres of trails available on Brunswick Landing. Days end with students in Crew groups, reflecting on the day, and planning next steps to meet standards.

While the lack of access to our future home has certainly presented challenges, we believe we have made the very most of the opportunity, and have designed a predictable, functional and safe environment for our students. We are eager to settle into our new home, but we have every confidence that in the meantime, we will continue to actively engage our students and move them towards proficiency.

Transportation:

As you know, we faced a significant hurdle with regard to our transportation plan prior to the start of the school year. We were informed that our 14 passenger MFSABs must be driven by adults with bus license endorsements. This was a change in our understanding of the policy governing these vehicles, and drastically limited our ability to operate our school.

As you know, there is a shortage of bus drivers in the state of Maine, and despite advertising for more than 5 months, we had no new applicants interested in driving for us. We are required by the Maine Charter School law to provide transportation to students from MSAD75 and Brunswick school district. For the past three years, we have offered transportation to students coming from Freeport, Bath, Durham and beyond. Due to this change, we had to re-route our two large buses to cover the SAD75 and Brunswick districts only. This put tremendous, unanticipated strain on many of our families; we were saddened by this turn of events.

SAD75 is a large and geographically complicated district and in order to meet our mandate of transporting all kids from this district, and Brunswick school district, using the large buses only, it was no longer possible to begin the route in Bath, where we had anticipated picking up 30-40 students daily.

To address the situation, we looked to parents for help, and they stepped up. We were able to create two large bus routes covering Harpswell, Bowdoinham, Bowdoin, Topsham and Brunswick. Parents created carpools from Bath, West Bath, Woolwich, Freeport, Lewiston and Lisbon. We had seats available for students from outside of the Brunswick and SAD75 districts to get on the buses, if parents could get them to a stop on the route. Other parents brought students straight to Brunswick Landing, and Division 1 students get on the bus to Harpswell there. Though this is not ideal, and some students have very long bus rides, we are happy to report that the routes are settled, they are working, and students are getting safely to and from school.

We have also taken the step to have two of our MFSAB vehicles converted into mini-school buses, complete with stop sign, flashing lights and the official yellow school bus paint. This will enable us to add door-to-door pick-up and drop-off for an additional 28 students. It is likely that we will use this added capacity in Harpswell first, and other areas as needed. This may enable us to begin a route in Bath once again.

Upon learning of the need for the school bus #3 endorsement for our drivers of the MFSAB and soon to come mini-school buses, we have had 10 faculty members begin the process to get this endorsement. This is a multi-step process involving a physical exam as well as tests with the DOE. We are eager to get faculty moving along in this process as it will enable greater mobility for Field Work, which to date, we are doing on site in both locations, by bringing experts to our campuses to work with students, and at locations within walking distance.

Enrollment:

With the two challenges detailed above, we thought we might see a precipitous drop in our enrollment at the start of the year. In fact, this was not the case. As always, we had some enrolled students (6) who did not show up, and when we followed up, we learned their plans had changed, and they had enrolled elsewhere. A few more (4) decided that the fit was not right in the first few weeks of school. We had two students who withdrew prior to the first day, due to a lack of transportation from Bath.

As of 9/26/16, our enrollment is as follows:

Division 1: 90 students; Divisions 2 & 3: 104 students

Additionally, we have offers out to 11 students who just recently expressed interest in joining us this year.