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MAINE CHARTER SCHOOL COMMISSION

# ANNUAL REPORT

TO THE COMMISSIONER

2020-2021 SCHOOL YEAR



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### **Staff Members**

Jeremy R. Jones, Executive Director 207.557.2859 | jeremy.jones@maine.gov

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Gina Post, Chief Program Officer 207.441.6571 | gina.post@maine.gov

### **Commission Members**

Seat #1 - Dr. Fern Desjardins (SBOE) Seat #5 - Shelley Reed

Seat #2 - Wilson G. Hess, Chair (SBOE) Seat #6 - Jim Rier

Seat #3 - Victoria Kornfield (SBOE) Seat #7 - VACANT

Seat #4 - Nichi Farnham, Vice Chair

### **Charter School Profiles**

ACADIA Academy 12 Westminster Street, Lewiston www.acadiaacademy.org	
Amy Dieterich, Board Chair	Brittiny-Rae Perron, Head of School
Grades Served - PK-6	Percentage Special Education - 23%
Enrollment - 272	Percentage Economically Disadvantaged - 29%

Baxter Academy for Technology and Science 185 Lancaster Street, Portland www.baxter-academy.org	
Patti Oldmixon, Board Chair	Kelli Pryor, Executive Director
Grades Served = 9-12	Percentage Special Education = 17%
Enrollment = 390	Percentage Economically Disadvantaged = 18%

Community Regional Charter School 48 South Factory Street, Skowhegan <a href="https://www.crcsme.org">www.crcsme.org</a>	
Danielle Denis, Board Chair	Travis Works, Executive Director
Grades Served = PK-12	Percentage Special Education = 20%
Enrollment = 349	Percentage Economically Disadvantaged = 62%

Ecology Learning Center 230 Main Street, Unity www.ecologylearningcenter.org	
Robin Huntley, Board Chair	Lēza Packard, Head of School
Grades Served = 9-10	Percentage Special Education = 28%
Enrollment = 47	Percentage Economically Disadvantaged = 45%

<b>Fiddlehead School of Arts &amp; Sciences</b> 25 Shaker Road, Gray <u>www.fiddleheadschool.org</u>	
Sally Morris, Board Chair	Jacinda Cotton-Castro, Executive Director
Grades Served = PK-7	Percentage Special Education = 21%
Enrollment = 172	Percentage Economically Disadvantaged = 13%

Harpswell Coastal Academy 9 Ash Point Road, Harpswell <a href="https://www.harpswellcoastalacademy.org">www.harpswellcoastalacademy.org</a>	
Cynthia Shelmerdine, Board Chair	Scott Barksdale, Head of School
Grades Served = 5-12	Percentage Special Education = 28%
Enrollment = 175	Percentage Economically Disadvantaged = 52%

Maine Academy of Natural Sciences 13 Easler Road, Hinckley <a href="https://www.meansacademy.org">www.meansacademy.org</a>	
Cheryl Bulmer, Board Chair	Matt Newberg, Head of School
Grades Served = 9-12	Percentage Special Education = 36%
Enrollment = 184	Percentage Economically Disadvantaged = 72%

Maine Arts Academy 11 Goldenrod Lane, Sidney www.maineartsacademy.org	
Sherry Gilbert, Board Chair	Heather King, Head of School
Grades Served = 9-12	Percentage Special Education = 15%
Enrollment = 200	Percentage Economically Disadvantaged = 35%

Maine Connections Academy 8 Science Park Road, Floor #3, Scarborough www.connectionsacademy.com/maine-virtual-school	
Amy Linscott, Board Chair	Walter Wallace, Head of School
Grades Served = 7-12	Percentage Special Education = 16%
Enrollment = 458	Percentage Economically Disadvantaged =40%

Maine Virtual Academy 6 Chestnut Street, Augusta www.meva.kl2.com	
Donna Pelletier, Board Chair	Dr. Melinda Browne, Head of School
Grades Served - 7-12	Percentage Special Education - 16%
Enrollment - 430	Percentage Economically Disadvantaged - 56%

# **Purpose**

This Annual Report to the Commissioner satisfies MRSA Title 20-A, Chapter 112, §2405.4 Reporting and Evaluation - an authorizer shall submit to the Commissioner an annual report within 150 days of the end of each school fiscal year summarizing:

- The authorizer's strategic vision for chartering and progress toward achieving that vision
- The performance of all operating public charter schools overseen by the authorizer, according to the performance measures and expectations specified in the charter contracts
- The status of the authorizer's public charter school portfolio of approved charter applications, identifying all public charter schools within that portfolio as approved, but not yet open; operating; renewed; transferred; terminated; closed; or never opened
- The oversight and services provided by the authorizer to the public charter schools under the authorizer's purview
- The total amount of funds collected from each public charter school the authorizer authorized pursuant to subsection 5, paragraph B and the costs incurred by the authorizer to oversee each public charter school.

# **Letter to the Commissioner**

Commissioner Makin,

It is with enthusiasm that we submit to you the 2021 Annual Charter School Report. This report fulfills our statutory obligation to provide the Commissioner of Education with an annual status report on the performance of charter schools in the state.

Since we submitted the last Annual Report to the Commissioner, many significant changes have happened at the Charter School Commission. We have seen some turnover of Commission members with the departure of long-time appointees Jana Lapoint and John Bird and the appointment of prolific public servants Wilson Hess (Chair) and Cynthia Murray-Beliveau. As we draft this report, we are awaiting appointments from the Governor's office to seats either already open or where term limits have lapsed. We look forward to continuing to work with the Governor's team so we can operate with a full complement of Commission members.

Despite changes in Commission members, we were able to spend the majority of the spring drafting, revising, and engaging the community on our strategic plan. The strategic plan represents an opportunity to clarify our mission, vision, values, and priorities. The plan will allow the Commission to monitor and provide support to the state's charter schools with increased effectiveness. The 2024 Strategic Plan, which can be found by clicking this link, is the product of many hours of diligent and thoughtful work intended to improve the academic achievement and social-emotional well-being of the children attending charter schools. The strategic plan was adopted by unanimous consent from the Commission members during the May 2021 business meeting.

The strategic plan has been the primary driver of our work since adoption and we commit to maintain focus on our priorities. The work continues in earnest and we take our responsibility to monitor charter schools seriously.

We appreciate your collaboration to ensure that all of Maine's students and families have excellent schools to attend and we look forward to discussing the details of this report with you and your team.

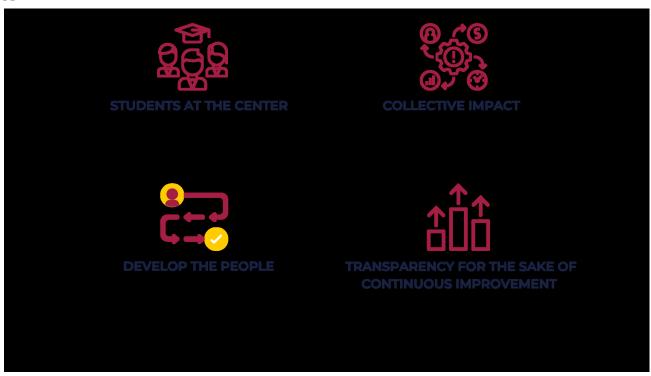
Jeremy R. Jones, Executive Director Maine Charter School Commission

# Mission, vision, values, strategic priorities

**Mission:** To authorize, monitor and develop unique public charter schools that provide a dynamic, superlative education for every student

**Vision:** All of Maine's children will have access to a vibrant ecosystem of diverse schools so that all of them can become happy, healthy and thriving citizens

### **Values**



### **Strategic Priorities**

# Strategic Priority #1: Increase student achievement and social-emotional well-being

Develop compassionate, self-actualized, and engaged citizens who live with choice and purpose

We exist to authorize and monitor unique schools that support the achievement and social mobility of children in Maine. Our first priority focuses on student achievement and social-emotional well-being because we believe the purpose of school is to help students understand the world around them and the world within them.

# Strategic Priority #2: Create the conditions for sustained excellence

Champion policies and practices that nurture the ecosystem of effective and diverse schools In order to continue the important work already started, the Commission seeks to create and nurture the conditions for sustained growth and excellence over time. A positive consequence of paying attention to the conditions that generate success is that we create an environment where schools can be successful independent of the Commission.

# Strategic Priority #3: Develop effective governing boards

Develop self-sustaining, effective, autonomous governing boards

The strength and performance of governing boards will determine the long-term success of the organization. At the core, the governing board's role is to ensure that the organization is financially healthy and it is holding the officers of the school accountable for the safety and achievement of its students. Charter school governing boards protect the sanctity of the school's mission and vision. In developing the boards, we better position the organization to mitigate liability, generate strong practices and policies that ensure success, and plan for sustained excellence.

# Strategic Priority #4: Foster collaborative innovation

Model continuous improvement and innovative educational delivery

The Commission has an opportunity to provide a catalyst to changes in the field, ultimately affecting student achievement and well-being. Through networking experts, providing opportunities for knowledge-building and convening leaders to problem-solve on shared challenges, the Commission can multiply the positive impact on communities through collaboration.

# Strategic Priority #5: Engage and activate stakeholders

Poke the campfire to ensure the public is knowledgeable about how charter schools contribute to a vibrant, thriving ecosystem of schools

A significant opportunity for the charter school program in Maine is making sure that we are engaging our stakeholders and audience in a conversation about the value proposition that charter schools provide. When we effectively communicate with and on behalf of our communities, we strengthen the culture of charter schools, reduce misconceptions and replace them with honest information, and create feedback loops to continue the progress and growth of the state's charter school program.

# Section A: progress toward the strategic vision

### Reorganization and staffing

In accordance with the strategic plan, we reorganized the staff and added the necessary capacity to support progress toward our goals. We seek to develop the professionalism of the Commission staff. As such, we have updated staff job titles to reflect the true nature of the work and align ourselves with authorizers across the country. Additionally, we added a Chief of Staff to help us maintain a laser focus on our priorities and to support project management. I am happy to report that our productivity has increased significantly with these changes and I look forward to developing the leadership of each of our staff members to ensure the sustainability of the Commission.

### **Budget adoption**

Along with reorganizing the staff, the Commission adopted a newly formatted and much more detailed budget. The new budget allows the Commission to manage and spend more effectively while creating an historical record of trends over time for better financial planning and increased transparency. We have developed new systems to analyze spending and deliver monthly budget-to-actual reports to the Commission.

### Updating the Performance Framework

The staff of the Commission is vigorously focused on implementing the strategic plan. Our current projects include unifying the charter schools on a common student information system platform to support reporting and align with the Department; additionally, we are updating our website to allow for greater ease of navigation and engagement. Two charter schools are currently going through the renewal process, which is an opportunity to highlight what is working well and use the tools available to us through contracting to ensure the schools continuously improve. Later this fall, the staff will focus on revising the Performance Framework, a key component of the charter contract, to hold schools accountable to post-secondary readiness, mental and emotional support for students, and governing board effectiveness.

# Section B: performance of the charter school portfolio

### Charter school stories

# **ACADIA Academy**

ACADIA Academy is very proud to have remained open five days a week for in-person learning for all students during the 2020-2021 school year. With safety measures in place, ACADIA was able to operate safely and experienced only one full-school closure due to the pandemic. The school had 186 days of in person learning with its regular school year and summer program.

# **Baxter Academy**

Baxter Academy serves students from 60 towns across southern Maine. Meeting health and safety requirements kept the school remote for the 2020-2021 school year, and the community rallied to overcome the distance part of distance learning. As school opened, masked teachers and administrators fanned out in the community with truckloads of learning-lab care packages for students. The shared experience set the tone for strong connections over Zoom.

### **Community Regional Charter School**

In June of 2021, CRCS celebrated its first graduating class. The school celebrated the accomplishments of 13 learners. Among these learners, 84% graduated from CRCS having completed at least one college course. Among those 84%, 27% graduated with over 20 college credits. One CRCS learner received the Mitchell Scholarship and is attending the honors program at the University of Maine in Orono as an engineering student.

### **Ecology Learning Center**

The Ecology Learning Center opened its doors with 47 students in grades 9 and 10 for the first time on September 1, 2020 as scheduled amidst a global pandemic. Students represented a wide diversity politically, socioeconomically, racially, and culturally. The diversity made the school's vision for collaboration a necessary challenge. Students from strong conservative families worked alongside strongly liberal families, hoeing and sowing together - literally - at a public park within walking distance of the school. Students cooperatively painted signs and built vegetable stands for Waldo County Bounty, a local nonprofit working to resolve food insecurity. Students researched and debated the pros and cons of the CMP corridor, again working alongside peers whose families held vastly different political views.

### Fiddlehead School

The Fiddlehead School connects the school world with the world around us. We break down the four walls of our classrooms to ensure that students have the necessary proximity to nature. Last school year, we extended learning to OUTDOORS and truly embraced it as part of our mission! A local newspaper took notice and featured us. Check out the story **HERE**.

### Harpswell Coastal Academy

In 2020-2021, HCA got back to its roots in expeditionary learning. HCA re-engaged with a network of public schools across New England that rooted their programs in character development and the production of high quality work. The school focused on academic growth and social-emotional well-being in the midst of the pandemic. HCA served students in person almost all year and supports students and their families during a time of immense need.

# **Maine Academy of Natural Science**

Means hosted a Summer Celebration with Food Trucks, live music, tours, farm and greenhouse demonstrations for the entire community. It was an old school fair with everyone from the surrounding area coming out to have fun.

### Maine Arts Academy

Maine Arts Academy persevered a school year characterized by a global health crisis by providing flexible outdoor education that focused on the arts. The school presented two successful outdoor recitals as well as an outdoor graduation at which 65 students conferred their diplomas.

### **Maine Connections Academy**

Maine Connections Academy saw a significant increase in course passing rates during the 2020-2021 school year, with approximately 90% of students passing courses in each of the core academic subjects. While many schools were navigating the art of online learning, Maine Connections Academy continued with programming while supporting students through a unique and challenging school year.

### Maine Virtual Academy

Using feedback from weekly schoolwide meetings, the MEVA faculty are building a virtual education platform and materials of its own design. Direct benefits include easing students' access to their virtual education by facilitating multiple devices utilizing the cloud, increasing teachers' flexibility to create individualized courses, and removing financial constraints in hiring additional teachers by significantly reducing Education Products and Service Provider's fees.

### Campus indicator performance tables

For school specific performance tables, use the links below to navigate to the school's individual report. Reports include charter specific data.

ACADIA Academy Harpswell Coastal Academy

Baxter Academy of Natural Science

Community Regional Charter School Maine Arts Academy

Ecology Learning Center Maine Connections Academy

Fiddlehead School Maine Virtual Academy

### Portfolio performance summary

School performance should be considered in the context of a global health crisis, which schools were battling throughout the 2020 - 2021 school year. Students and families were grappling with job loss, health concerns and insecurities, and anxiety related to the pandemic. Schools continued to serve students and families despite the COVID-19 crisis. That service often meant that schools focused on basic needs of students like social-emotional well-being and psychological health.

### Legend of School Abbreviations

AA - ACADIA Academy	HCA - Harpswell Coastal Academy
BA - Baxter Academy	MEANS - Maine Academy of Natural Sciences
CRCS - Community Regional Charter School	MeAA - Maine Arts Academy
ELC - Ecology Learning Center	MCA - Maine Connections Academy
FSAS - Fiddlehead School	MeVA - Maine Virtual Academy

<sup>\*</sup>Due to the continuation of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Charter Commission has publicly provided school performance data, but did not assign accountability ratings to that data. Charter-specific student level data can be found in individual charter reports on the Commission website.

Student Academic Proficiency

\*No ratings were assigned due to COVID-19

Target 1	Collect baseline data on NWEA MAP - ELA
Target 2	Collect baseline data on NWEA MAP - Math

	Student Academic Growth *No ratings were assigned due to COVID-19		
Target 1	ELARL MAP RIT scores within a school year (fall to spring)		
Target 2	Math MAP RIT scores within a school year (fall to spring)		
Target 3	% students meeting projected growth on ELAR MAP test		
Target 4	% students meeting projected growth on Math MAP test		

Achievement Gaps *No ratings were assigned due to COVID-19	
Target 1	Achievement gaps between major subgroups on MEA
Target 2	Achievement gaps between major subgroups using MAP test

Student Attendance				
Target 1	Chronic absente	eeism		
Target 2	Average Daily At	tendance		
	Exceed	Met	Partially Met	Not Met
Target 1	ELC	BA MCA	MeVA	AA CRCS FSAS HCA MEANS MEAA
Target 2 (K – 8)	MCA MEVA	AA	CRCS HCA*	FSAS
Target 3 (HS)	MCA BA MEVA ELC	MEAA CRCS		MEANS HCA*

<sup>\*</sup>Pending resolution of discrepancies between the school and MDOE

Student Enrollment				
Target 1	Enrollment within a school year			
Target 2	Recurrent enrollment from one year to the next			
	Exceed	Met	Partially Met	Not Met
Target 1	AA BA CRCS ELC FSAS HCA MeAA MCA MeVA	MEANS		
Target 2	AA BA CRCS ELC FSAS HCA MeAA MeVA	MEANS		

	МСА	
		i .

Post-Secondary Readiness				
Target 1	4-year high school graduation rate			
Target 2	5 and 6-year average high school graduation	rate Pending rele	ase of data from	n MDOE
Target 3	Participation in at least one post-secondary a	ctivity		
Target 4	Successful Completion of post-secondary activity			
	Exceed	Met	Partially Met	Did not meet
Target 1	BA		MEAA MCA MeVA	HCA MEANS
Target 2	pending	pending	pending	pending
Target 3	MCA MeVA	MeAA BA	MEANS	НСА
Target 4	BA MeVA HCA MEANS MCA	MeAA		

<sup>\*</sup>CRCS information is withheld to protect student privacy given the size of the cohort

Financial Performance					
Target 1	Near Term – (A) Currer	Near Term – (A) Current Ratio; (B) Unrestricted Days Cash on Hand <i>Pending financial audit</i>			
Target 2	Sustainability – (A) Tota	Sustainability – (A) Total Margin; (B) Debt to asset ratio Pending financial audit			
Target 3	Annual audit has no material findings/misstatements. Pending financial audit				
	Exceed	Met	Partially Met	Not Met	
Target 1	pending	pending	pending	pending	
Target 2	pending	pending	pending	pending	
Target 3	pending	pending	pending	pending	

Governance				
Target 1	Public Accountability			
Target 2	Publication of Board ag	Publication of Board agenda and minutes		
	Exceed	Met	Partially Met	Not Met
Target 1	AA MeVA CRCS MCA ELC FSAS	BA MeAA HCA MEANS	No option to partially meet	
Target 2	No option to exceed	BA MeVA MCA	AA ELC	

|--|

Facilities N	Facilities Management			
Target 1	Meet Local/State requirements			
Target 2	Capital Improvement Plan			
	Met	Not meet		
Target 1	AA MeAA BA MEANS CRCS ELC MCA MeVA FSAS	HCA		
Target 2	AA MeAA CRCS MeVA FSAS MCA BA	ELC HCA MEANS		

School Cli	School Climate				
Target 1	Reporting behavior incide	nts			
Target 2	Family Panorama Particip	ation			
Target 3	Student Panorama Partic	pation			
Target 4	Staff Panorama Participat	ion			
Target 5	Panorama Survey Action F	Plan			
	Exceed	Met	Partially Met	Not meet	
Target 1	No option to exceed	AA MeVA FSAS HCA MCA MEANS BA MeAA CRCS ELC	No option to partially meet		
Target 2	AA HCA MCA MeVA			BA MeAA ELC FSAS CRCS MEANS	
Target 3	ELC MCA	BA CRCS HCA MeVA	FSAS	AA MeAA MEANS	
Target 4	AA BA MCA MeVA	CRCS FSAS MEANS	HCA	ELC MeAA	
Target 5	No option to exceed	MCA MeVA			

# **Section C: Charter School Authorizing**

# Updates on Epicenter

Epicenter is a tool that allows the Commission to solicit documents and data from the ten charter schools. The online platform warehouses many of the source documents that support holding the charter schools accountable and is a best practice tool among charter school authorizers across the country. With the adoption of the new budget, the Commission will have the ability to leverage

additional tools within Epicenter to monitor school performance, develop performance dashboards and execute the renewal process with eligible schools.

### Charter schools in renewal

The Charter Commission is currently reviewing the renewal applications for two charter schools nearing the end of their current contractual terms. Maine Academy of Natural Science (MeANS) and Community Regional Charter School (CRCS) are both in the penultimate year of their current contract. Each has provided the necessary application for renewal. The Commission staff has held focus groups with students, families, staff and governing boards of each charter organization and public hearings have been conducted for each as well. Commission staff is going through a rigorous analysis of each organization's performance including financial management, strategic planning and student achievement. The Commission will consider these applications at its October 2021 business meeting.

This section summarizes actions taken by the Commission to approve schools for operation in the state. It includes information on when schools were authorized and which schools have been renewed for operations.

1	Approved	Ecology Learning Center	October 2019
2	Operating	ACADIA Academy	September 2016
		Baxter Academy for Technology and Science	September 2013
		Community Regional Charter School	October 2012
		Fiddlehead School of Arts & Sciences	September 2013
		Harpswell Coastal Academy	September 2013
		Maine Academy of Natural Sciences	October 2012
		Maine Arts Academy	September 2016
		Maine Connections Academy	September 2014
		Maine Virtual Academy	September 2015
3	Renewed	ACADIA Academy	October 2020
		Maine Arts Academy	October 2020
4	Transferred	None	
5	Terminated	None	
6	Closed	None	

7	Never Opened	None	
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## Section D: Services to support excellent performance

### Infinite campus

The Charter Commission has recognized an opportunity to support charter schools by capitalizing on economies of scale. At times, services can be provided to the charter schools at a more efficient cost to the Commission than to the individual charter school districts. Along with cost savings, the Charter Commission seized the opportunity to align reporting practices with the Maine Department of Education. By partnering with Infinite Campus, a student information system, the charter school districts have a tool that supports their operations and does so at a cost that is more sustainable.

### Modern Classrooms Project

The Charter Commission is committing resources to the growth and development of educators. Given the unique approach of charter schools to meet the needs of every student, we have partnered with the Modern Classrooms Project to support the ability of classroom teachers to personalize instruction for students. The pilot cohort of this partnership will develop twelve teachers from across the charter school districts to create and implement new classroom systems that personalize instruction.

# **Board Development**

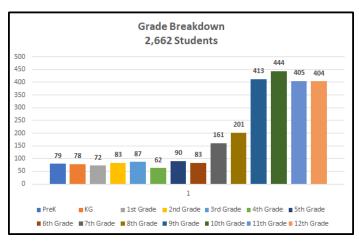
Charter school governing boards have the tremendous responsibility to ensure the officers of the organization are faithfully executing the covenants of the contract between the board and the state. Governing boards need to be proficient in financial management and planning, data analysis, strategic planning and hiring and holding an executive director accountable for results. Charter school boards are composed of volunteer community members with a stake in the success of the charter school. Because the expectations are high, they deserve to have access to the training and resources that will help them be successful. The Charter Commission has developed a board training curriculum and expectations that will provide necessary support to board development. We are working with local and national partners to facilitate board training and are developing tools that will be housed on our website that governing boards can customize for their purposes.

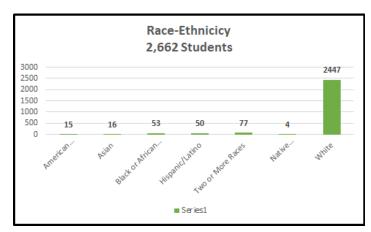
### **Section E: financial performance**

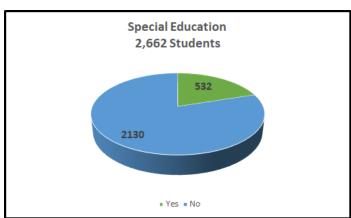
State law allows the Charter School Commission to draw up to 3% of the annual per-pupil allocation received by each public charter school under its authorization. The Commission recently voted to increase this amount from 2.25% to 2.35% to provide additional services to the charter organizations.

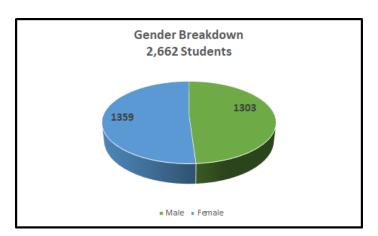
Based on the FY21 ED279s, the Commission's revenue was \$641,221.94 of which \$575,288.58 was spent on monitoring performance and supporting the success of Maine's public charter schools. The balance was carried over to FY22.

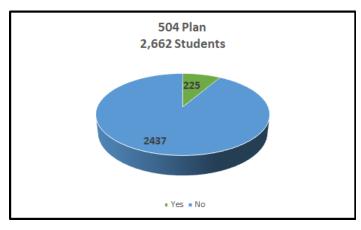
# **Section F: Demographics**

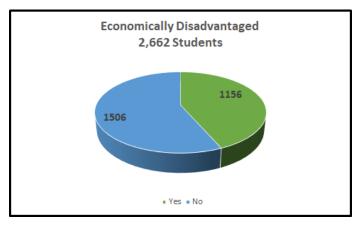












### Additional Resources

- <u>Performance Framework</u>
- Budget

2021 Graduation Rates of Chart 4-Year Cohort Performance Fram		es	
	4-Year Cohort for 2021	5-Year Cohort for 2020 (not yet available)	6-Year Cohort for 2019 (not yet available)
Baxter Academy	92.5%		
Community Regional Charter School	* withheld to maintain student privacy		
Harpswell Coastal Academy	64.5%		
MEANS	50.9%		
Maine Arts Academy	86.4% (less than 2% from target)		
Maine Connections Academy	68.7% (increase of 2% or more from previous year)		
Maine Virtual Academy	69.7% (increase of 2% or more from previous year)		
State	86.12%	89.33%	89.94%

Chronic Absenteeism Rates by Charter and compared to state rates Performance Framework Target is 10% or less						
	Chronic Absenteeism Rate	Compared to state				
ACADIA Academy	16.8%	lower				
Baxter Academy	10.0%	lower				
Community Regional Charter School	27.4%	higher				
Elementary	27.1%					
Secondary	28.0%					
Ecology Learning Center	6.1%	lower				
Fiddlehead School	28.5%	higher				
Harpswell Coastal Academy	40.7%	higher				
Elementary	40.3%					
Secondary	40.9%					
MEANS	75.8%	higher				
Maine Arts Academy	20.1%	lower				
Maine Connections Academy	9.7%	lower				
Elementary	6.9%					

Secondary	10.9%	
Maine Virtual Academy	10.6%	lower
Elementary	4.3%	
Secondary	13.4%	
State	21.02%	