



Maine Association for Charter Schools
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MACS Newsletter - September 2009

Welcome to the new school year!
With autumn comes the promise of exciting new opportunities
for public charter schools in Maine!

Nationally ...

- With strong support from President Obama and Education Secretary Duncan, more and more people support the public charter school model.
 - A recent poll by Gallup/Phi Delta Kappa showed that two out of three Americans support public charter schools. The poll also demonstrated that Americans' approval of charter schools has increased by 15 percent over the past five years. ([National Alliance for Public Charter Schools Newsblast](#), 9/10/09)
- With the start of the 2009-2010 academic year, over 400 new public charter schools opened their doors and more than 170,000 new students started the year in public charter schools. The addition of these new charter schools and students means that **there are now approximately 4,900 public charter schools enrolling over 1.5 million students across the United States.**
 - *President Obama:* "There are caps on how many charter schools are allowed in some states... That isn't good for our children, our economy, or our country... I call on states to reform their charter rules, and lift caps." (March 2009)
 - *US Secretary Duncan:* After the Maine Senate twice voted in June to defeat public charter school legislation, Secretary Duncan said, "States that slow innovation are limiting opportunities for students and placing themselves at a competitive disadvantage for \$4 billion in Race to the Top Fund grants." (June 24 statement, www.ed.gov, speeches)
 - *Bill Gates:* "Caps should be lifted for charter school operators who have a proven record of success, and children in charters should be offered the same per-pupil funding as other public schools." (Speech to National Conference of State Legislators, 7/21/09)

In Maine ...

- MACS is working with Maine's Department of Education to bring charter school legislation back before the legislature during its second session which begins in January, 2010. We are hoping that Governor Baldacci will introduce Maine's first successful charter school bill.
- Economic indicators are proving the increasing need for charter schools in Maine. Awareness of the rising tide of high school and college dropouts in Maine jumped this summer following a July conference at UMO; when known, the associated costs will be staggering.
- Maine has lost millions of federal dollars since 1996 for our public school system. The charter school grant program has been distributing our tax dollars to the other states with public charter schools.
- Maine has abdicated its very favorable position in the current **\$ 4.3 Billion Dollar** Race to the Top Grant Program, by failing to pass charter school legislation this spring. Maine is poised to lead the eleven states without enabling charter school laws if it can muster the political will to pass a law in January's second session.
- Maine can lead nation (and the Race) with the best charter school law - the law proposed by MACS is based on the model law developed by the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools incorporating the experiences of forty states since 1993 and the knowledge of what is critical to a high quality public charter school program.
- If Maine's Legislature approves a pilot program of public charter schools, Maine will gain:

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- By stemming the rising tide of high school and college dropouts;
 - 3,000 students drop out of Maine high schools each year (MEDOE)
 - 7,000 Maine students drop out of college each year (Who really knows? – MACS has preliminary data showing 1/3 of Maine college freshman drop out before their sophomore year.)
- By channeling millions of federal dollars back to Maine for public education, bringing home the tax dollars we already send to Washington, dollars that have been going to public education systems in other states.

Since the 1st Legislative session ended ...

MACS has been very busy this summer! MACS has participated in the National Charter School Conference in Washington, DC, two Master Classes sponsored by the National Alliance, (in Dallas and Philadelphia), and a one-week workshop at the EdVisions charter school in Henderson, Minnesota. We have also had hundreds of conversations with supporters and potential supporters, individuals and organizations, throughout Maine.

Public Charter School Supporters Published in the Journal of Maine Education

In the 2009 issue of the *Maine Journal of Education*, the official journal of the Maine Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, four of the fourteen articles discuss public charter schools.

- Cheryl Saliwanchik-Brown, Bangor area coordinator for MACS, points to the need for new options in her article, "What Schools Can Learn from High School Dropouts."
- Maine teacher Sara Young discusses, "Lessons from Our Past and Choices for Our Future: The Case for Publicly Funded Charter Schools."
- JME Editor Karen Kusiak interviews the architect and leader of a cutting-edge charter school in New York City, "A Conversation with Zeke Vanderhoek of 'The Equity Project'".
- MACS board member Judith Jones discusses the many advantages of public school choice, including public charter schools, in her article, "Improving Maine Schools Through Public School Choice."

For copies, contact MACS at macs@mainecharterschools.org

EVENTS Coming Up...

October 7th - MACS Board Member Emanuel Pariser will receive one of the Champions for Children Awards from the Maine Children's Alliance for his work on behalf of students at risk in Maine, including his developing the highly effective model of "relational education." MACS nominated Emanuel for this award and we are delighted at his recognition. The event will be from 5:30 to 7:30 pm, Freeport Hilton Garden Inn. FMI, see www.mekids.org.
(MACS has reserved two seats; if you would like to attend, please contact us.)

October 15 - MACS, working with Maine Department of Education, will host a "Public Charter School Forum" in Augusta for invited policy makers, potential authorizers, and potential organizers. Participating will be national experts from the US Dept. of Education, the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, the National Association of Charter School Authorizers, and representatives from charter school authorizers and organizers from other states.

October 19-21 - The National Association of Charter School Authorizers hold it's annual conference in Salt Lake City, Utah. MACS is now an associate member of NACSA and will receive technical assistance along with a discount on publications and conferences from this experienced group. FMI see www.qualitycharters.org.

MACS' Immediate Challenges...

- MACS is building its organizational capacity as a Charter School Support Organization (CSO), by recruiting additional board members, hiring additional office staff, and expanding its network of volunteers to spread the word about the importance of public charter school options.
- MACS is working to build a coalition with other Maine organizations who support public school choice as a means to addressing educational, social, and economic issues through the public charter school model.
- MACS is seeking donations and grants to support our efforts to get quality charter school legislation passed in Maine during the second legislative session which begins in January.

Experience in other states has shown that a strong charter school support organization such as MACS is critical to a strong state charter school program, not only to educate about, and to advocate for, high-quality public charter schools; but also, to counter the continued efforts of opponents with vested interests in the current system, who would deny students, parents, and educators charter school options within public education.

The recently published edition of "Philanthropy Roundtable" urges individuals and foundations to support charter schools and charter school support organizations. "Investing in Charter Schools – A Guide for Donors," www.philanthropyroundtable.org.

Thank you so much for your interest in, and support of, our work in bringing charter schools to Maine. Please contact us with your questions and your ideas - and do let us know if you are able to make a donation of either time or money in support of our continuing, vitally important efforts on behalf of Maine children.

MANY THANKS!

Roger W. Brainerd, MEd.	Executive Director
Judith D. Jones, PhD.	Board Chair