

SUBJECT

Richard McKenna Charter High School Annual Update

APPLICABLE STATUTE, RULE, OR POLICY

N/A

BACKGROUND

Richard McKenna Charter High School (RMCHS) is a public charter school authorized by the Public Charter School Commission (PCSC) and located in Mountain Home since 2002. RMCHS served approximately 380 students in 2012-2013 through its brick-and-mortar school and virtual high school.

DISCUSSION

RMCHS will provide an update on the status of the school. Meeting materials were submitted after the deadline and have, therefore, been excluded from this document.

RMCHS met [AYP](#) for 2011-2012 and received a [2012 Star Rating](#) of 3 out of 5. The school received two 2013 Star Ratings, a 3 out of 5 for the [school's general program](#) and a 1 out of 5 for the [school's alternative program](#).

The Star Rating for RMCHS's general population was similar in 2012 and 2013. However, math proficiency decreased from 82% in 2012 to 70.2% in 2013. Additionally, the school received 4 of 10 of the available points for graduation rate in 2013, though it had received 8 out of 10 in the previous year. Notably, RMCHS's 2013 Star Rating calculation did not include growth data, as there was not an adequate sample. RMCHS did not submit an appeal to the SDE regarding the Star Rating for the general school.

Though the school's 2013 Star Rating of 1 out of 5 for its alternative program appears concerning, the school had limited data available for review and, therefore, received a rating based on only one measure. RMCHS participated in the appeals process for the alternative school.

RMCHS is projecting similar enrollment in 2013-2014 to what was experienced in 2012-2013. Student end-of-course survey results from spring 2012 indicate a 95% approval rating. However, more recent survey data has not been provided.

RMCHS continues to operate with a substantial fiscal reserve. In FY13, the school had a single-year deficit of approximately \$200,000, resulting from board decisions to spend some of the school's savings to purchase property and pay for course development. RMCHS's FY14 budget projects adding approximately \$60,000 to the school's reserves. Having purchased property, the school is in the planning stages to construct new buildings on the site while maintaining their

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current facility. The board is currently considering applying for a charter revision to expand RMCHS to a K-12 program.

IMPACT

Information item only.

STAFF COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Staff has no comments or recommendations.

COMMISSION ACTION

Any action would be at the discretion of the PCSC.

**Idaho Public Charter School Commission
Site Visit Report**

School	Richard McKenna Charter High School (RMCHS)
Address	675 S. Haskett Street, Mountain Home, ID 83647
Date of Site Visit	April 26, 2013
PCSC Staff Present	Alison Henken, Charter Schools Program Manager
Board Member(s) Interviewed	Douglas Maine, Treasurer Maralee Smith, Member
Administrator(s) Interviewed	Larry Slade
Business Manager / Clerk Interviewed	None
Other Stakeholder(s) Interviewed	Students

Board Member(s) Interview

Douglas Maine, Treasurer, and Maralee Smith, Member, participated in the interview. Mr. Maine has been a board member for three years; Ms. Smith joined the board approximately one year ago. The board members described the school's mission as providing students the opportunity to grow and develop by giving them experience and knowledge and helping them make connections between the two (experience and knowledge) and the world while also helping them develop values and ethics. They believe that all students learn differently, and that RMCHS should help prepare students to go into the world with an education they can apply to their lives.

The board members feel they have a good relationship with the administrator, Larry Slade. They believe that Mr. Slade is forward thinking and focused on students. The board brings diverse backgrounds, but has a cohesive vision that is generally well-aligned to the views of the administrator. They board and administrator have not had any significant differences of opinion; the board members attribute this to the willingness of both parties to listen and work through difficult decisions. The board members described the division of roles at RMCHS – the board finalizes and approves financial decisions and lays out long-term goals, while the administrator's job is to implement those goals.

To the knowledge of the board members who participated in the interview, the RMCHS board has never conducted a self-evaluation. Board training is relatively informal. Ms. Smith, who has been with the board for a year, said that she has not attended any formal trainings but has learned through asking questions. Generally, the board has used programmatic audit, PCSC, and SDE visits as opportunities to receive feedback, but hasn't participated in many structured training sessions, either internally or externally facilitated.

When asked about concerns they have related to the school's academics, operations, or finances, the board members stated that their concerns are minimal. They would like to see enrollment go up and stay up and are working on planning and implementing marketing and advertising strategies to forward this goal. They believe they have a good facility and are in good shape financially; the board and administration is currently working on a plan to expand the school's facilities and enrollment. Other than enrollment, the board's biggest concern is planning to replace Mr. Slade as administrator when he chooses to retire. Though they believe they have some time before this will occur, they recognize the importance of having a strong administrator and are doing their best to prepare the school for a transition whenever it becomes necessary.

Administrator(s) Interview

Larry Slade, Administrator, participated in the interview. Mr. Slade believes that the school's focus and implementation has not shifted significantly since the approval of the charter. He feels that RMCHS pushes students to be responsible for their lives through the development of academic and work skills. The curriculum is project-based (students work on a new project every six weeks) and active. While Mr. Slade believes that test scores are important, he measures success through feedback from students and parents.

Mr. Slade described his relationship with the board as strong and supportive, adding that the board questions him and doesn't let him "off the hook" when it comes to decision making. He believes that he and the board have a similar vision for the school, and he feels that the division of roles between the board (oversight, policy, and finances) and administrator (day-to-day operations) are appropriate.

Mr. Slade stated that he believes RMCHS is "ahead of the curve" in preparing for the implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and Smarter Balanced Assessment (SBA), primarily because of the school's project-based focus which pushes students to solve problems. The school's courses are already mapped against the CCSS and the school's leadership is working on a process to identify and address any gaps. The online courses have already been revamped so that quizzes and tests are no longer multiple choice, which Mr. Slade believes will begin to prepare the school for the more complex questions of the SBA.

When asked about his concerns for the school, Mr. Slade responded that he would like the school to have stronger academic results; while they are pushing students, he would like them to "do better than they are." He is not concerned about finances, though RMCHS is working to increase enrollment to maintain a strong budget. On the other hand, Mr. Slade did express concern about decisions made in the legislature regarding education, both in general and particularly in terms of the tendency to decrease discretionary funding.

Informal Student Interview

During a brief break between classes, the PCSC staff member had the opportunity to speak briefly with a group of approximately eight (8) to ten (10) students enrolled in the on-site program at RMCHS. The following reflects the questions presented to the students and their summarized responses.

How can your school improve?

- Students could be given more of a voice in the courses that are available
- More hands-on and fun classes, like acting, art, and video game making
- More PTE courses, like welding or auto-mechanics
- The rules could be loosened a bit (students were not in a consensus on this response)
- The uniform / dress code could be a little more flexible (allow for skirts, shorts, open-toed shoes) to allow for students to express their individuality but still with some guidelines
- Deadlines for assignments should be less strict (students were not in consensus on this response)
- We understand why we can't use cell phones in class, but it would be good if we could be allowed to use them during breaks or in the courtyard

What do you like about this school?

- There are fewer students than most schools, so you can get the help you need

- We have fewer classes at once, so it's easier to focus
- There is a comfortable atmosphere; teachers and students are friendly
- Some of the classes are fun
- The teachers seem to really care – they check on us when we're working and make sure we understand the subject and the project we're working on

Documents Review

Finances

The end-year finances for FY12 and year-to-date finances for FY13 were reviewed in person. Larry Slade was available to answer questions. Though RMCHS had a single-year deficit of approximately \$149,000 in FY12, the school ended the year with a significant carryover (nearly 1 million). They anticipate ending FY13 with a single-year deficit. Despite this, it is likely the school will still end the year with a strong carryover of over \$800,000. The budgeting and monitoring practices appear to be appropriate. At this time, there are no concerns about the documents reviewed or the school's financial situation.

Special Education Files

The PCSC staff member pulled two (2) files at random for review. The Special Education Director, Kim Flick, works most of her hours remotely and was not at the facility, but was available to answer questions by phone as needed. The files were organized and documentation was in order. All IEPs were up-to-date, including clear accommodations and LRE reports. Eligibility reports were up to date and there was evidence of communication with parents. There are no concerns about the files reviewed at this time.

Classroom Observations

The PCSC staff member had the opportunity to visit three (3) classes at RMCHS. Of these, the activities observed in one (1) course demonstrated RMCHS's project-based learning approach; students were working in small groups to complete science projects. The teaching methods of the remaining two (2) classes were a mix of lecture and discussion. In one (1) of these classes, the instructor allowed students to guide discussion and generate questions as much as possible and only added information or guided the discussion to push students to go deeper or to address lulls in the conversation. In two (2) of three classes, the majority of students appeared to be engaged in learning, in the remaining class, some students were engaged and active in the discussion while others (approximately half) were sitting quietly but did not appear to be engaged in learning. Teachers generally demonstrated strong behavior management techniques and created classroom environments of mutual respect. In one class, pacing seemed to be a little slow, resulting in some lack of engagement and struggles with transitions. Overall, the PCSC staff member did not have any significant concerns with the teaching and learning that was observed.

Summary

Strengths

- The school has fiscal stability
- Classroom observations, though limited, revealed that students enrolled in the onsite program appear to be engaged in learning

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- Students report that they feel the school's atmosphere is comfortable and friendly and that they feel comfortable getting the help they need

Challenges or Areas for Improvement

- Academics meet minimum state standards but could be improved, as evidenced by the school's 3 Star Rating (2012)
- Board training and evaluation could be improved- board members have participated in minimal facilitated trainings (either internally or externally) and have not conducted a self-evaluation to date

Concerns

- There are no significant concerns about the school at this time.

Possible Charter Violations

- There are no apparent charter violations at this time.

Possible Charter Amendments

- There are no potential charter amendments at this time.

Recommendations

- PCSC staff recommends that the board and administration continue to work to improve the school's academic outcomes and Star Rating.
- PCSC staff recommends that the board consider how it can improve board training and self-evaluation.

Materials or Follow-up Requested of the School

- No additional follow-up was requested of the school.