

MOTHER EARTH'S CHILDREN'S CHARTER SCHOOL

CHARTER RENEWAL APPLICATION



Submitted to

Honourable Adriana LaGrange
Minister of Education

Submitted by

**MOTHER EARTH'S CHILDREN'S CHARTER SCHOOL
SOCIETY**

November 27, 2019

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Mother Earth's Children's Charter School
RR1, Site 2, Box 42 Warburg, AB T0C 2T0

Honorable Adriana LaGrange
Minister of Education
Office of the Minister
228 Legislature Building - 10800 - 97 Avenue
Edmonton, AB T5K 2B6

November 27, 2019

Dear Minister LaGrange:
Re: Charter Renewal- Mother Earth's Children's Charter School

It is my pleasure to submit for your consideration, the enclosed copy of our Application for a Five Year Charter Renewal. This document represents the culmination of the past six years of work that has occurred in our school to realize our vision for effective education of First Nation students.

It contains specific responses to the recommendations of our previous charter renewal and the mid-term charter evaluation. We feel that the recommendations and requirements have been met. In addition, our submission will demonstrate the many ways we have met and continue to improve our ability to meet the unique needs of our students.

There are many mitigating factors involved in this application but the bottom line is that we are very good for our students providing them with opportunities they simply will not have without us.

Therefore, we are now requesting that the term of our Charter be renewed for five years in accordance with the Charter School Regulations. All additional information required for the purposes of renewal have been posted on our website as required.

For your information, the following resolution was passed during the Regular Meeting of the Mother Earth's Children's Charter School Society on November 25th, 2019:

"Motion to approve for submission, the application for five year charter renewal as per the attached document. Carried"

While we acknowledge the ongoing issues and challenges that both students and the school itself face, it has been rewarding for all concerned to see the gains students make academically and socially as a result of attending the school.

I trust that you will find the documentation submitted in support of our request for Charter Renewal in order. In the event that you require additional information, please contact our Superintendent, Mr. Ed Wittchen at ed.wittchen@telus.net or at 780-222-4022.

We look forward to your response.
Sincerely,

Dale Friedel
Board Chair
Mother Earth's Children's Charter School Society

Current Status

Based on a review of the most recent charter application and related correspondence, in a letter dated Jan 29, 2014 Minister Jeff Johnson granted the term of the current charter from September 1, 2014 to August 31, 2019 with an enrolment cap of 234. The conditions outlined in the letter were as follows:

- Continue to implement strategies to improve results
- Become involved in research informed practices
- Develop partnerships with post-secondary institutions.
- Collect independent research that would support the charter.

In January 2018, Deputy Minister Curtis Clark extended /approved a one year extension of our five year charter. The conditions outlined in that extension were as follows:

- Addressing the vulnerability in terms of sustainable enrolment and financial viability
- Address long term tuition agreements with local bands
- Continued focus on student's low academic levels on PAT results.

How did we do in regard to those conditions:

- Our Three Year Plans and Action Plan address our strategies and the results.
- With limited resources, we don't have an ability to pay for research help and we don't have the staff numbers to do it ourselves. What we do have is a series of partnerships that has allowed us to share our story while learning about that makes our partners special and unique as well. Those actions have supported our charter.
- Our research has been in two parts:
 - Action research on the value of partnerships in developing our students and sharing our story with other schools.
 - Nurturing Capacity: Building Community Success which was a research study conducted by Indspire and University of Alberta researcher Sean Lessard PhD. This community-led process was supported by an Indspire funded Indigenous scholar, who works with programs on the ground to provide training on data collection and evaluation methodology.
- We have established a partnership with the U of A through involvement with their U School as well as the previously mentioned research study.
- We can't avoid the issue that we remain vulnerable in terms of sustainable enrolment. We are not unique in that regard as many small schools have the same issues. We are faced with the fact that Paul Band will open a new school sometime in the near future. The saving grace for us is that the parents we currently have are incredibly loyal to this school and are not likely to change and we make a difference for students as compared to the results from the on reserve school.
- There is no interest in the local band to establish a tuition agreement and we are not interested as we already have perhaps the best tuition agreement in Alberta as our agreement is with the Crown and guarantees us the same funding rates as Alberta Education provides. We never have the kind of funding /payment issues other jurisdictions do in regards to getting paid as per the agreement.

- Student achievement is always our top priority. When you review the long term results we have had an interesting ride. There is no question that our results have improved over time but we are not playing on a level playing field with schools across Alberta. Our students arrive with many problems including the residual resident school history their parents/grandparents carry, the myriad of social issues (drugs, alcohol, transiency, lack of parenting skills, etc.) present on the reserve. Despite that we can show success story after success story.

MECCS has, in the past few years, created and fostered lasting partnerships with a number of community members and concerned stakeholders reaching out into the greater community. Our partnerships with major oil and gas companies serve to not only provide us with financial stability, they also create opportunities to engage these companies with the FNMI community we support. For the past six Christmases TransAlta has connected students at MECCS with employees in their head office in Calgary. The students write letters to “Santa”, meanwhile the TransAlta staff prepare cards with our student’s names, gender and age on them and display them on a Christmas tree in the lobby of the building. The employees choose a name, receive the child’s “Santa” letter and purchase a gift. These gifts are delivered by TransAlta employees and “Santa” and our children are always so grateful and excited to receive them. It makes a huge difference to our children and their families to know that there is someone out there who cares for them.

MECCS has always been about adults caring deeply for children. Fostering a mutual respect while developing a culture of learning drives everything we do.

With the support of adults who care and believe in their potential, our youth can discover their hidden talents, develop personal responsibility, and find a purpose to their lives. Many of the children MECCS serves suffer from some form of adversity. Resilience is the innate human ability to rebound from adversity with even greater strength to face future obstacles. Research has shown that resilience is the norm for kids. This means that it is never too late to make a difference.

MECCS work has always been about culture, community, and students learning. MECCS operates much like that of a family and believes that when learning, founded within a cultural context, encourages positive attitudes and promotes a sense of pride; that our children gain a sense of belonging, discover what they are good at, become independent thinkers, and find purpose in life.

Name of Society/ Background

Mother Earth's Children's Charter School is governed by the Mother Earth's Children's Charter School Society.

Mother Earth's Children's Charter School (MECCS) opened its doors in the fall of 2003. Previously located in the village of Wabamun, MECCS has operated since 2009 in the former Saint John's School of Alberta 30 minutes southwest of Stony Plain on the banks of the North Saskatchewan River near Genesee. Originally we leased the school from the former operators, Company of the Cross. In 2012, Friends of Mother Earth Education Foundation with the financial assistance of private supporters raised \$1.3 million to purchase the school and we have leased it from this registered society since then. Surrounded by acres of forested land, MECCS is positioned well to carry out its charter mandate to infuse Aboriginal students with their culture while following the Alberta Programs of Study.

MECCS actively supports all students from Kindergarten to Grade 9, recognizing that the social, physical, emotional and academic readiness levels may vary and may be influenced by socioeconomic challenges. MECCS makes every effort to keep class sizes small and manageable. MECCS currently provides service to 55 students with the hope of gradual growth in the coming years. One hundred per cent of the students enrolled are of Aboriginal ancestry with the majority attending from Paul First Nation.

MECCS offers a sound educational program founded on Indigenous teachings that foster students' self-confidence and self-respect, increasing their appreciation of the cultural connections to Mother Earth. Their unique cultural approach to education emphasizes the importance of personal recognition to aim for balance in all four quadrants of the medicine wheel (spiritual, intellectual, physical, and emotional). MECCS is designed to nurture, guide and challenge each child to rediscover the gifts given to them by the Creator thereby achieving personal growth and fulfillment. MECCS programming meets the needs identified by students, families, Elders and staff.

Foundational Statements

Mission

MECCS exists in order to holistically nurture, guide and challenge each child's spiritual, intellectual, physical and emotional self through traditional Indigenous teachings.

Vision

Rediscovering the gifts and potential given to them by the Creator, our children will achieve personal excellence and fulfillment.

It is important to note that our mission and vision are ones of traditional respect and spirituality. We define spiritual growth as the evolution and development of one's essential self and the potential one has to become in their life.

Key Values

- We value the Medicine Wheel as a philosophy of balance
- We value the Seven Sacred Teachings (Respect, Love, Courage, Wisdom, Honesty, Humility, Truth) as a basis for action
- We value Spiritual Connectedness as a means of realizing personal excellence
- We facilitate Culture through spiritual and social connectedness, together with academic excellence
- We value Respect for self, Culture and accomplishments

Philosophy

MECCS believes that there are four needs that must be met for every child to be able to succeed. Every child feels the need:

- for Belonging (I mean something to you),
- for Mastery (I am good at something),
- for Independence (I have power to make decisions), and
- for Generosity (I have a purpose in life).

Mother Earth's Children's Charter School remains deeply rooted in the teachings of our

Indigenous culture, aware of the past, mindful of the present and cognizant of the future.

It is important to note that our vision is one of traditional respect and spirituality. We define spiritual growth as the evolution and development of one's essential self and the potential one has to become in their life. Noted in Alberta Education's *Our Words, Our Ways*, MECCS vision and mission are reinforced by Cree Elder Joe Couture stating, "A holistic philosophy and psychology rooted in traditional Native values can improve the educational opportunities for Native children."

The Medicine Wheel reminds us that the four components of the self, spiritual, physical, social/emotional, and intellectual are all of equal importance. This is particularly important to focus on when we are planning for the education and development of our children. The current mainstream education system is much more heavily focused on the intellectual development of the child; however, we know that if we neglect the development of any of the parts of the whole self, none of the parts will develop to their maximum potential.

There have been many books written about the Medicine Wheel and they often differ as to the placement of some of the teachings. So while there are many interpretations of the medicine wheel, there is really no wrong way to build a wheel, after all a circular walk has no beginning and no end. It is more of a question of what resonates with each individual as one studies the teachings. The central essence of the medicine wheel is that each of us must make our own choices.

Medicine Wheel teachings are among the oldest of First Nations people and are based on the seven directions: North, East, South, West, Father Sky, Mother Earth, Centre.

The symbol of the sacred circle represents a harmonious relationship with nature and with all living things who are our relatives and that all things are connected and equal, as we know the circle has no beginning and no end. Mother Earth is often referred to as a Medicine Wheel or Sacred Hoop because she is circular and she also turns in a circle motion.

One hundred per cent of the students enrolled are of Aboriginal ancestry with the majority attending from Paul First Nation. MECCS also draws students from neighboring rural communities as well as the broader communities including Enoch and Edmonton. MECCS aims to increase student diversity by continuing to attract a broader student population from all surrounding areas.

MECCS offers a sound educational program founded on Indigenous teachings that foster students' self-confidence and self-respect, increasing their appreciation of the cultural connections to Mother Earth. Their unique cultural approach to education emphasizes the importance of personal recognition to aim for balance in all four quadrants of the medicine wheel (spiritual, intellectual, physical, and emotional). MECCS is designed to nurture, guide and challenge each child to rediscover the gifts given to them by the Creator thereby achieving personal growth and fulfillment.

Cultural activities reflect the following key components of the Charter:

- Elders
 - At the core of traditional education lies Aboriginal spirituality and traditional knowledge. Elders play a vital role, passing on traditional knowledge to students.

By conducting and providing instruction in ceremonies such as sweat lodges and pipe ceremonies, Elders teach learners to honor what is sacred in the universe as well as what is sacred in each of us.

- Smudging
 - In keeping with traditional practices of self-care and personal development, smudge and prayer take place every morning to begin the day with positive energy. Each classroom also receives a daily cultural infusion lesson that may focus on a wide variety of different Indigenous teachings.
- Language
 - MECCS offers Stoney language classes for all students. The school believes that language and culture are the underpinning of the entire foundation of an Aboriginal-based education. The revitalization of the language are key to the recapturing of cultural understanding and pride in our children. The Language Instructor also provide students with a wide range of cultural crafts, games and songs.
- Feasts
 - A feast is held on the first day of each new season. Each season has its own reasons for celebration.
- Land-Based Learning
 - MECCS is home to many acres of beautiful, natural land. The school utilizes this land to present experiences that solidify lessons learned in the classrooms and to provide important cultural teachings. The land is home to a ceremonial area, and a Cultural Camp site, acres of trails used for hiking, cross country running and snowshoeing, and access to the North Saskatchewan River.

With the support of adults who care and believe in their potential, our youth can discover their hidden talents, develop personal responsibility, and find a purpose to their lives. Many of the children MECCS serves suffer from some form of adversity. Resilience is the innate human ability to rebound from adversity with even greater strength to face future obstacles. Research has shown that resilience is the norm for kids. This means that it is never too late to make a difference.

As our traditions teach us, we must nurture the development and educate the whole child as was given to us by the Creator. The philosophy and foundation of our school community and program are based upon traditional Indigenous teachings of the medicine wheel passed down from our Elders.

To improve student achievement and outcomes, MECCS aims to fundamentally change instructional practice from that of neighboring mainstream schools as well as achieve stronger results than those of their home reserve. Teachers, support staff, administrators and board members alike need to be cognizant of student's home life and family realities that make for unique needs that have to be addressed. Everyone must be aware of cultural sensitivities and be willing to take purposeful risks to challenge decades of student performance if we are to succeed in helping every child reach their maximum potential.

Charter Goal - Spiritual Connectedness

Outcomes:

- Each child will understand how his or her spirit connects to the world around them
- Each child will be able to answer the question “how am I connected to my Traditional Culture?”
- Each child will demonstrate knowledge of the Seven Sacred Teachings, articulate what they are and be able to discuss how they demonstrate one or more of them in their daily life.

Measures

- Percentage of children who participate in cultural ceremonies and events -100 %
- Percentage of parents who attend and are involved in cultural/spiritual programming and events -100%
- Percentage of teachers & support staff who attend and participate in cultural learning experiences- 100%.

The Charter Board

MECCS is fortunate to have a Board of Directors who understand, recognize and support the importance of providing students with the opportunity to reach their maximum potential.

Our Board of Directors is comprised of five individuals whose combined experience and expertise bring a wealth of much needed knowledge, strength and governing stability to the MECCS community. An important factor is that for perhaps the first time, all of the Directors have an indigenous background.

Website Links for Additional Information/Support

Policy Manual- <https://www.meccs.org/site/admin/board-policies/>

Administrative Procedures Manual- <https://www.meccs.org/site/admin/administration-procedures/>

Bylaws- <https://www.meccs.org/site/admin/bylaws/>

Newsletters- <https://www.meccs.org/site/monthly-newsletters/>

Audited Financial Statement- <https://meccs.org/site/documents/AFSAug202018.pdf> Update after Board meeting Nov 25

Three Year Education Plan/Annual Education Report-

<https://meccs.org/site/documents/3YearEducationPlan2018to2021andAERR2018.pdf>

Student Enrollment History

The September 30th enrollments for the past six years are as follows:

2014 125

2015 68

2016 75

2017 70

2018 69

2019 51

2020 and beyond- with the opening of a new school on Paul First Nation anticipated in 2020 we expect our enrolment to fluctuate between 50-75 over the next few years as families move between schools and communities on a regular basis. The families we currently serve are extremely loyal and have stated they have no interest in returning to a band operated school. At the same time, realistically we are not going to attract many additional students from families that are loyal to the band school. We will continue with our efforts to recruit from neighboring communities and local foster parents. Having the stability of the charter renewal and owning the school outright will go a long way to dispelling the regular rumors that we would be closing.

Organization for Learning

The school employs a staff of 14 consisting of a superintendent, secretary- treasurer, .6 maintenance coordinator, principal, four classroom teachers, a .2 Stoney language instructor, a home liaison coordinator, cook, assistant cook, 1.0 teacher assistants, a bus driver, a custodian.

Evaluation Recommendations/Requirements and Ministerial Expectations

The Alberta Education/ MECCS Evaluation Report of 2011 identified a number of commendations, seven recommendations for consideration, and two required changes. In 2014, the charter renewal letter from the Minister of Education to the charter school encouraged MECCS to become involved in research informed practices and develop partnerships with neighbouring post-secondary institutions. The Minister indicated that student achievement remained a concern and he expected the school to implement strategies that would see results improve on Provincial Achievement Tests (PAT).

In compliance with the charter renewal process, we underwent both an internal self- evaluation and an external review in 2017 which identified several requirements and recommendations for which we subsequently developed an action plan.

Increasing student enrolment was a required change. Without an increase in students, MECCS will have difficulty sustaining itself. The school needs to increase enrolment to stabilize the financial viability of the school.

A number of initiatives have been tried in recent years with not a lot of discernible success as the numbers have remained fairly static for the last 5 years. We can identify several reasons that parents provide and that economic circumstances control:

Distance- some years we have been able to transport students from Edmonton and as far away as Onoway, Seba Beach, Alberta Beach, Spruce Grove and Stony Plain when parents wish to enrol or keep them enrolled at MECCS. We receive some funding from Alberta Education when that occurs but it is not enough to justify the cost of the bus run required. We will leave this option open in future years but we cannot predict from year to year how many parents will move off reserve into Edmonton and want the service. For the last two years there have not been enough students to justify running that bus.

Standards- we have academic, attendance and behavioural standards and we have heard from some parents that their children did not want to stay here because the work was too hard (i.e. our standards were too high and we actually expected them to do the work) or we were too strict (i.e.- they didn't want to comply with our behavioural expectations.) Those are not areas we are prepared to compromise on but unfortunately some parents have allowed their children to dictate where they will attend.

Family issues- we have heard from some parents that they don't like having to get up and drive their kids to school when they miss the bus as a reason for not sending them here any longer. The socio economic and lifestyle issues on the reserve are well documented and just as they are across Canada very difficult to overcome. When kids don't get enough sleep, are in an environment that includes drug and alcohol issues, things like attending school, getting your kids to bed at night and up in the morning tend to take a back seat.

Internal Band Politics

There are some things that are just beyond our control. For example, when the husband of one of our long term staff was elected to the Band Council, the family of another candidate who was defeated in the election opted to remove their children from the school.

Alternative Opportunities

It appears that more young families are moving off reserve into Edmonton or other centres which is reducing the number of school age students on reserve. That is impacting schools in Parkland that serve the same student population as we do and have seen a similar reduction in student enrolment. We should not underestimate the impact that having a new school on the reserve might have. It is already far behind construction schedule but eventually will open. We know we have families that have stated they will never go back to a school on the reserve and that have been very loyal to MECCS for a number of years.

Cultural Academy

In an attempt to recruit and retain students, starting in October 2017 we have offered students the opportunity to participate in cultural related classes. A major one is the opportunity to learn the Stoney Language: The Stoney Language is considered to be in danger of disappearing, as it is only spoken by about 3000 people, (mostly Elders) only in Alberta. It is a challenging language to learn, as it is very difficult to write.

Mary Theresa Bird, a respected Elder from the Paul First Nation joins us every Wednesday to work with our young people. She is teaching students conversational Stoney so that they can make more meaningful connections to the grandmothers and grandfathers in the community, thus preserving their history.

Drumming is led by Terrence Paskemin Sr. with Darcy Paul Jr. Terrence has led the renowned Drum Group, Blackstone since the late 1980's. They perform regularly throughout Western Canada and Western US. Terrence Sr.'s children have attended MECCS for the past six years. The Blackstone Singers are one of the elite Pow Wow groups in North America. The group began performing and competing together in 1987 and took its name in honour of their Grandfather Blackstone. In 1996, the group won the World Championship Pow Wow competition in Hartford, Connecticut. Since 1990, the Blackstone Singers have made over 20 recordings of their Pow Wow songs and round dances. Our students are very fortunate to be able to learn from such a distinguished and successful performer.

Aboriginal land stewardship:

We are fortunate to have had local Paul First Nation member, Donny Rain, join us to teach our students about how their connection to the land can be a symbiotic relationship. He leads them on outdoor excursions to explore the 160 acre parcel that MECCS stands on. During these outdoor sessions, Donny discusses the way the land can provide for us and demonstrates methods of tracking, reading natural signs, and trapping, all the while reminding the children that they have a responsibility to the natural world all around us.

Beading

Principal Erin Danforth leads the beading. Most of the students who are in the group know how to bead already, or have at least attempted to do it on their own. Erin and the students explore techniques like;

loom beading, peyote stitch and lazy-stitch and the students have the opportunity to complete at least one project per quarterly session.

Target Archery

We have 2 certified instructors and 2 in training. There is a historical connection to the sport that will be explored. The school also received a grant and some funding from St. John's School that allowed us to purchase the necessary indoor equipment. Our students have started to learn the fundamental skills of this sport.

Student Achievement

A required change directed the school to develop, implement and evaluate a focused action plan that outlines the strategies and measures to improve academic achievement so that the school is able to demonstrate significant improvement in this area prior to the charter school renewal application.

The successes of Mother Earth can be attributed to a dedicated, caring staff that successfully balances academic needs with human development and cultural needs. Success for Mother Earth students means taking students who are generally at risk and guiding their academic and social course toward active and responsible age appropriate citizenship (working cooperatively, handing in assignments, attending school regularly etc.) While passing the graded curriculum and successfully entering and completing Grade 9 remains and is our ultimate objective, attending school, completing assignments, caring for themselves and others, volunteerism, positive self-esteem and other pro-social behaviors are also considered desirable outcomes and measurements of success. Achievement is the bottom line but the pathway involves many factors that traditional schools do not have to deal with:

1. Maintain and expand where possible activities that deals with human development and cultural needs of the students. Students often attend (school and to their teachers) when their needs are met. Once they attend school, other needs that may not be so present like reading and writing and arithmetic can be successfully met. Therefore, we continue to:
 - a) Provide a healthy lunch program;
 - b) Provide varied and daily cultural celebrations and ceremonies;
 - c) Invite and use the expertise of elders to promote cultural awareness and pro- social skills;
 - d) Work with other schools in partnerships in order to compare and study other cultures with aboriginal culture. (i.e. for the 2019/20 school year, these partnerships include Academy at King Edward in Edmonton Public SD, Wildwood School in Grande Yellowhead SD and Suzuki Charter School.
 - e) Work with outside organizations to improve student learning opportunities (i.e. U of A U School)
 - f) Invite inspiring aboriginal artists to work with our students including:
 - Author David Bouchard has been connected to an annual visit to MECCs for 5 years for 2-3 days per year. His books form the basis for the literacy program one of the teachers uses.
 - g) We have established partnerships with HeartBeat Theatre (annual 3-day residency) and Spirit North (8 week introduction to cross country skiing).
 - h) Take students on varied fun but educational field trips including trips connected to positive consequences of higher learning (to the U of A);

The students, parents, staff, school council and community members consider the school program to be successful. Despite the challenge and previous attempts, it was recommended that the school continue to build a positive relationship with the Paul Band Chief and Council.

We have basically ignored the recommendation because we know there is no appetite at Paul Band for collaboration or cooperation. A succession of Chief and Council members/ Education Directors/School Administration personnel have not been able/willing to move this relationship forward even though in recent times there were what we would call MECCS friendly members on Council at times. The simple fact is that we are in direct competition with them for students and history has shown they will do whatever it takes to draw students to their school. The most recent example was when they offered jobs to a number of parents on the condition their students transferred back to their school. This is not the first time and previously the end result was the parents were laid off later but it was too late. In the past they have claimed they would have things like a hockey academy which drew students away but then didn't deliver on the program but again it was too late for parents to transfer kids back with funding.

Our consensus is that our efforts will be best put toward strengthening our program and making it even more attractive as an option.

Research Informed Practices

While the staff has experienced many forms of in-service from educational experts and traditional sources of knowledge, such as Elders, there is not a clearly articulated and shared vision of teaching and learning at the school. As part of the charter revision process, it was recommended that the staff through guided conversations develop and articulate a shared vision of teaching and learning. This vision will answer the central question: "What does excellence in teaching and learning look like and sound like at MECCS?"

The focus of our literacy program continues to be the Picture Word Inductive Model developed by Dr. Bruce Joyce. We have an external consultant, John Orr who was trained by and who worked with Dr. Joyce for a number of years. He works with new staff and provide updates for existing staff. In addition, the Consultant has been trained by Dr. Barrie Bennett and will provide PD to staff on his research. Dr. Bennett's research interests relate to teacher thinking, learning, and action focused on instructional practices. He seeks an understanding of how teachers acquire an instructional repertoire, how they extend and integrate it, and what effect this has on student learning (kindergarten to adult). Both of these will be major components of the shared vision on teaching and learning.

Share Innovative Practices

It was recommended that the school seek academic and/or First Nation, Métis and/or Inuit partnerships that can provide research support for the shared vision of the teaching and learning within an indigenous environment.

Beginning in October 2017 MECCS partnered with National Aboriginal organization *Indspire* through their researcher Sean Lessard. Working together, we engaged in reflective practices, which inform our future planning. Further to our partnership with *Indspire*, principal Danforth presented at the National Gathering for Indigenous Education in November 2017. Her workshop focused on the benefits of having Indigenous students engage in cultural exchange programs and how to facilitate successful exchange experiences in First Nations communities. Principal Danforth is also a member of the Program Advisory Council for Experiences Canada, the non-profit organization that coordinates Canada-wide student exchanges, and presented to their board at their AGM in November 2017. Teacher and 2019 recipient of the Governor General's History Award for Excellence in teaching. Maxine Hildebrandt recently

presented at the semi-annual TAAPCS conference. Her presentation highlighted collaboration between MECCS and Wildwood School and demonstrated the benefits of sharing innovative practices across districts.

Community Engagement

The school was encouraged to continue its efforts to engage parents.

While parent involvement at MECCS has never looked like parent involvement at other schools in more affluent locations, we are able to attract parents to events where they feel more like guests and less like students. There are pre-existing issues surrounding education and First Nations people which MECCS has striven to address. In September MECCS hosts 2 events which are extremely well attended by our parent community. Our Traditional Fall Feast and Pipe Ceremony is held in September and attracts many parents and community members and our field trip to the Edmonton Corn Maze attracts 20 plus parent/community volunteers. Both of these events provide opportunities for teachers to engage parents in an informal manner and allowed both parties to communicate. Upon reflection, it seems likely that including parents in experiences that are more social in nature will attract them to the school. Their own generational poor experiences with formal schooling continues to be a barrier. Therefore, we identified several opportunities that allowed us to engage parents and community members:

- TAAPCS October meeting. A group of MECCS students, supported by their parents, were invited to represent our school and share their gifts and talents as entertainment for the evening.
- December 2014- 2019. Trans Alta sponsored “Santa” visit. A group of volunteers from Trans Alta brings gifts for the students that have been donated by Trans Alta employees in Calgary. We host the team of volunteers at the school as “Santa” presents the gifts to each individual student.
- February 2018, Hockey Hooky. We participate in this yearly event with the Oil Kings. Typically, this has been very well-attended by parent volunteers.
- March 2018. Spring Feast. We planned our spring report card distribution to coincide with this date, so that we ensured we were making the most of the opportunity to speak with parents.

The school is administered effectively.

It was recommended that the principal’s teaching assignment for the 2017-2018 school year be reduced to provide more time during the school day to complete her leadership and administrative responsibilities.

This was done at the commencement of the 2017-18 school year. Thanks to the financial contribution of Richard Bird and his Ptarmigan Foundation we were able to hire additional help and in turn that allowed her to return to her previous role with the Kindergarten class. She teaches the class every morning and has every afternoon available to her for administrative and leadership tasks.

One of MECCS growing strengths is its team approach both at the operational and administrative levels. We know that in many Aboriginal families, decisions are made collaboratively rather than by one individual. And, as we know from experience, the old cliché two heads are better than one, resonates in MECCS approach to leadership.

At the administrative level, MECCS has developed a Leadership Team consisting of the Superintendent, Secretary Treasurer, Principal, Director of Maintenance and Family Liaison Coordinator. Together, this

strong leadership team guides, supports, mentors, manages, and leads by example providing a solid educational framework.

The school meets the terms and conditions of its charter and has performance measures that show clear evidence of success.

The original Charter document indicated that MECCS would honor the whole child and would model itself on the concept of the Medicine Wheel. Over the years, MECCS has integrated the holistic philosophy of balancing the intellectual and physical needs of the child with their spiritual and emotional needs in order to create a learning environment that is harmonious and supportive. Evidence of the use of the Medicine wheel to inform planning and instruction is present in the classroom and in the instructional materials the teachers choose.

We offer an environment where children feel safe, valued and where there is a stable environment in which they can be nurtured and grow. Our students tell us that MECCS is a place where they feel connected and cared for and where their needs are met. Their responses on Provincial Surveys are overwhelmingly positive and the fact that many of our students and families return year after year demonstrates that MECCS has the support of the community and meets its charter.

The school operates in a manner consistent with all applicable provincial requirements.

MECCS operations are consistent with all applicable provincial requirements. We provide the Provincial Government with mandatory quarterly financial reporting as well as annual budgets and fall updates to the budget. We contract MNP LLP to audit the finances annually to ensure that we are working in accordance with all Provincial and professional accounting standards. The administrative team work closely to ensure that all provincial financial guidelines are strictly adhered to. Many checks are in place to guard against fraud. The auditors have consistently reported that we are performing well and meet/exceed the necessary standards for all financial compliances.

The Transportation department operates under the supervision of the Secretary-Treasurer and Maintenance Coordinator. Vehicles are properly repaired and maintained as per Alberta Transportation safety and maintenance standards. School busses are inspected semi-annually by a licensed repair facility to ensure that they meet required safety standards. All safety-related repairs are performed at a licensed repair shop. Additionally, busses are inspected semi-annually by the Maintenance Coordinator. The safety of our students is our top priority. Bus drivers must provide a Commercial Drivers abstract, Criminal Records Check as well as a Child Intervention Check. Our drivers know our students which is an added bonus.

Operations and Maintenance also falls under the supervision of the Secretary-Treasurer and Maintenance Coordinator. The Maintenance Coordinator is diligent in inspecting the school and equipment, keeping it in top running order. He employs trusted repair companies to assist in plumbing, heating, refrigeration and any structural issues that may arise. He is also responsible for grounds maintenance, keeping our school road, parking area, playground and green space well-maintained and safe at all times.

The students, parents, staff, school council and community members consider the school program to be successful.

Our results on the Provincial surveys indicate that parents, teachers, and students feel that the school is successful and improving. In 2012 only 68% of the respondents felt that the school was improving, 80%

felt the school provided a safe and caring environment and 82% were satisfied with the quality of the educational experiences the students were provided. In 2019, we see a dramatic increase in all three of these areas (school was improving- 96.2%, provided a safe and caring environment- 96.8%, quality of education- 96.4%). Another key survey result reflects that 100% of parents, students and staff feel students are taught attitudes and behaviours that make them successful after leaving school. 88.2% support that students demonstrate knowledge, skills and attitudes for lifelong learning.

Other stakeholders are supporting MECCS as well. We have several long-standing partnerships with private companies who see the benefit of creating a safe, caring and supportive learning environment for FNMI learners. TransAlta and Enbridge have both contributed to our hot lunch program and The Company of the Cross and Saint John's Legacy Foundation have supported our mandate for the past few years. These partners have helped sustain MECCS in the past and have pledged to continue to do so in order to ensure we can maintain our delivery of a quality educational experience.

The school is financially viable and responsible.

MECCS operates on a very strict budget. Revenue comes from the Province, INAC and various committed donors. MECCS also has a fundraising arm- Friends of Mother Earth Education Foundation; a group of dedicated volunteers who work behind the scenes enlisting the aid of various donors whose charity allows the school to operate successfully. Everyone at MECCS is mindful of the limited funds under which we operate. We are cost-conscious and spend our dollars wisely and with as much efficiency as possible. We receive computers and related equipment from Computers for Schools, and Tools for Schools provides essential school supplies, allowing us to utilize our dollars in other areas.

We operate a Hot Lunch Program with assistance provided annually by Enbridge Corporation (Enbridge has committed funds up to the 2021-2022 school year) and Breakfast for Learning.

Everyone at MECCS is committed to doing their part to ensure the sustainability of the school. While small in numbers we manage to keep up with the demands of operating a successful school. Those demands, in many areas, equal that of schools whose budgets are far larger than ours. We contribute our time and labor willingly and frequently to ensure that our students have the best possible education. Our instructional staff has a proven track record as is evidenced by our PAT scores, which continue to improve year by year.

We make every effort to ensure that our students enjoy the same benefits as they would in any other school. That fact that we are small, in many ways, is a benefit to our students whose needs are often large as we are able to provide a more family-like atmosphere.

Student success is determined in accordance with Ministerial Order.

At MECCS we "grow great kids" and part of that is embracing the philosophy that we are preparing our students for a greater role within society. We look beyond our walls when offering them opportunities to build relationships and give them the chance to experience people and situations that they would not normally have access to.

Our school graduates students whereas their home reserve school does not.

The charter school uses research-informed practices to create innovative learning environments and improve student learning.

As the first Indigenous charter school in Canada, MECCS derives its philosophy from the lived worldview of the Cree and Stoney First Nations. These worldviews generate specific notions of the relationships which honour body, spirit, and body. Our instructional practices and innovative learning environment flow directly from our cherished Indigenous worldviews. At the core of our worldview is the respect for the medicine wheel which esteems mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical aspects of each learner in our care (Canadian Council on Learning, 2007; Battiste, M., 2002; Brendtro, L., Brokenleg, M. & Van Bockern, S., 2014). Elder and community wisdom provide flexible and culturally appropriate guidance as the core foundation for student learning. Curriculum, assessment and best culturally honouring practices are considered first from the Indigenous perspective which respects a decolonizing (Battiste, 2013) paradigm. As budget permits, sweat lodges, back to the land field trips, drumming circles, smudging protocols, pow wows, feasts honour Indigenous identity and create an atmosphere for improving student learning and assessment.

The charter school shares its innovative practices and learning outcomes with others in the educational community.

MECCS welcomes approved visits from other stakeholders throughout the school year. Participation in our smudge circles, daily routines, ceremonies, feasts, powwows, exchange field trips, sports events, and culture camps provide an opportunity to support and learn from each other and respect different worldviews. The medicine wheel and seven sacred teachings (e.g. humility, honesty, courage, love, truth, wisdom, respect and honesty) are reflected in every interaction and activity. Visitors experience our Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing which celebrate student strengths and achievements.

The charter school reaches out beyond its walls to demonstrate broad and sustained levels of community engagement.

MECCS has, in the past few years, created and fostered lasting partnerships with a number of community members and concerned stakeholders reaching out into the greater community. Our partnerships with major oil and gas companies serve to not only provide us with financial stability, they also create opportunities to engage these companies with the FNMI community we support. For the past six Christmases, TransAlta has connected students at MECCS with employees in their head office in Calgary. The students write letters to “Santa”, meanwhile the TransAlta staff prepare cards with our student’s names, gender and age on them and display them on a Christmas tree in the lobby of the building. The employees choose a name, receive the child’s “Santa” letter and are encouraged to purchase a small gift. These gifts are delivered by TransAlta employees and “Santa” and our children are always so grateful and excited to receive them. It makes a huge difference to our children and their families to know that there is someone out there who cares for them.

For ten years, Enbridge and TransAlta have financially supported our hot breakfast/hot lunch program. Without that support many of our students would not have adequate nutrition.

We have also reached out to other educators by encouraging our staff to present at conferences. Recently, staff have presented at the Youth at Risk conference in Calgary as well as the Treaty 7 Education Conference. Our principal has been invited to speak with the Treaty 7 confederation on MECCS’s innovative practices and we have welcomed the Leadership group of the TAAPCS to our school to see MECCS in action. Yellowhead Tribal College staff have come to MECCS to deliver instruction and we continue to be a part of the Treaty 6 Athletic Council in order to provide opportunities for our students to participate in competitive team sports. Participation in the Experiences Canada exchange program also

serves to connect our school to the broader community not only by allowing our students to travel and live within another community but also by compelling our students to learn more about their home community in order to act as hosts for their partners.

We also offer many opportunities throughout the year for the local community at Paul First Nation to join us to celebrate our uniqueness. Two Traditional Feasts, held in the fall and spring, mark the changing of the seasons and we are honored to welcome a local Elder to perform a Traditional Pipe Ceremony. Parents, grandparents and other community members are welcome to attend, and many do. We also have a Christmas celebration where members of our local community can come and see the children perform and a celebration of learning at the end of the year where we recognize the efforts of our unique population.

The school is administered effectively.

“It takes a village” is an understatement when it comes to the administration of our school. The managerial team consists of the Superintendent, Secretary-Treasurer, Principal, Home Liaison Coordinator and Maintenance Coordinator who work under the guidance of our dedicated Board members. Our size does not permit additional clerical or maintenance assistance, which is sometimes taxing, yet we are able to comply with all Provincial and Federal Standards in all departments.

The finance department is the sole responsibility of the Secretary-Treasurer whose job it is to perform all required government reporting – both Provincial and Federal; budget; payroll; accounts payable; and accounts receivable. She oversees the Operations & Maintenance and Transportation Departments. Working closely with the Superintendent she is responsible for the school budget and the administration of all expenditures. She monitors the IT requirements of the school; maintains the website and the Student Information System.

The Secretary Treasurer works with the Maintenance Coordinator to ensure consistent maintenance and safety of the school and that of the Transportation department. The Maintenance Coordinator is a licensed journeyman auto body mechanic and holds a welding certificate. He is essentially a very valuable ‘jack-of-all-trades’ whose talents have saved the school countless dollars over the seven years he has worked for us. He works three days a week doing more than many would accomplish in five days. He repairs the roof, plumbing, electrical, mechanical, boilers.... You name it he can repair it. However, he is always safety conscious and consults with the Secretary-Treasurer when he feels the repairs require that of a skilled plumber, electrician, etc.

The Operations and Maintenance Department is responsible for the Hot Lunch Program. The Secretary-Treasurer takes care of securing donations and any other available funding. She monitors and shops for the groceries keeping watch over not only the food costs but the quality and quantity of the food. This allows for securing the best food possible and avoids waste, all the while maintaining the Hot Lunch budget. Annual applications to Breakfast for Learning and subsequent reporting also fall under the O&M umbrella as do insurance and adherence to Alberta Health Services safety guidelines. Our cook ensures that the groceries purchased and donated are utilized fully, while providing quality, tasty, nutritional meals. The kitchen is spotless and consistently meets or exceeds AHS standards.

The Maintenance Coordinator is responsible for the maintenance of the school and grounds. He ensures the safe operation of the building, and all equipment, affecting repairs where required. He works along-

side out-sourced workers when qualified repair companies are on-site and ensures efficient use of their time in an effort to control their charges. He performs road maintenance and snow-removal. He cares for all the school maintenance equipment, performing as many repairs as possible to keep costs down. The Transportation department is challenging due to the road conditions our busses endure on a daily basis. Reserve roads are rarely maintained. The ruts and bumps shakes the busses causing many problems, as does the mud which cakes up the under-carriage and any exposed wiring. These issues, alone, are responsible for a large portion of repair costs. The Maintenance Coordinator has allowed us to control transportation costs, as he monitors the busses regularly, sending drivers in to wash their busses on a consistent basis in an effort to eliminate mud damage. Due to his automotive mechanical abilities the Maintenance Coordinator has taken on the added responsibility of maintaining the school busses. Where, in previous years we would have sent busses out for oil changes and minor repairs the Maintenance Coordinator now performs those tasks as well. He ensures that the busses are inspected semi-annually (CVIP) as per Alberta Transportation regulations. He also performs a semi-annual inspection of his own in the off-setting 6 months between CVIPs. He and the Secretary-Treasurer frequently drop the busses off and pick them up coming and going to work, to eliminate the cost of paying a driver to run them in and pick them up. He also watches for the minor issues which can translate into greater damage. He repairs it before it becomes a more serious issue. He works closely with the repair shop and has formed a close relationship with them to ensure that we get good, quality service at fair prices.

While it may seem that we are all stretched a bit at the seams, we continue to function productively and successfully because our staff is committed, hard-working people who care about the students and the school. They care about the school's sustainability and are willing to devote the time and effort to see it continue and flourish.

Action Plan Development and Implementation

Student Achievement

A required change from the 2011 evaluation and 2017 mid term evaluation directed the school to develop, implement and evaluate a focused action plan that outlines the strategies and measures to improve academic achievement so that the school is able to demonstrate significant improvement in this area. An action plan was created which included the development of supplemental quantitative measures, including baseline measures that illustrate strong academic achievement.

Process

Staff led by the principal met to discuss the barriers and strengths of the school as it relates to attaining and maintaining 'high achievement'. The principal along with a consultant who has worked with the school since 2012 generated strategies and quantitative measures that best use the strengths of the school to overcome barriers to high achievement and maintain and improve student achievement. The action plan is designed to be:

- Achievable in an environment of low prep time and multiple grades in each class;
- Achievable for all staff regardless of experience;
- Implemented over the entire year without exhausting staff and/or becoming a distraction to the goal of successfully teaching students day to day;
- Ongoing and adaptable so that teachers can make changes based on the experiences of staff and data analysis of the previous year;
- Encourage students to develop day to day habits that contribute to their own success in school; and
- Low cost in terms of in servicing and the acquisition of student and teacher resources.

The proposed action plan was presented to staff, modified and accepted by staff and then presented to the superintendent for approval.

Strategies to Maintain High Achievement

Though barriers to high achievement are many and sometimes profound; with persistence and focus high achievement is attainable. The path to high achievement is difficult without ongoing feedback, so ongoing simple and basic assessment of students that are not time consuming or difficult to maintain records is essential.

Mother Earth has students that have many personal issues that often interrupt the process of education in a regular school (attendance, cultural issues, etc.). Secondly, students have learning issues that, most often are expressed as uneven grade level abilities (i.e. strong in math, high needs in reading), low abilities across subjects or low literacy and/or numeracy skills. Finally, students have health related issues that make learning difficult under the best of circumstances. (i.e. lack of sleep, nutrition, unstable home life, etc.)

The successes of Mother Earth can be attributed to a dedicated, caring staff that successfully balances academic needs with human development and cultural needs. Success for Mother Earth students means taking students who are generally at risk and guiding their academic and social course toward active and responsible age appropriate citizenship (working cooperatively, handing in assignments, attending school regularly etc.) While passing the graded curriculum and successfully entering and completing Grade 9 remains and is our ultimate objective, attending school, completing assignments, caring for themselves and others, volunteerism, positive self-esteem and other pro-social behaviors are also considered desirable outcomes and measurements of success.

Currently, all Mother Earth students are aboriginal. A major school focus is and must be on providing Native Arts programs, cooperating with events sponsored by the Aboriginal and Métis Community and promoting Aboriginal and Métis culture and heritage while providing successful education outcomes. To be successful Mother Earth has had to focus not just on Academic Development but Social-Emotional Development and Experiential Development and to do this without strong engaging support from parents.

To accomplish this, the staff of Mother Earth proposed the following recommendations and followed through as noted:

2. Maintain and expand where possible activities that deals with human development and cultural needs of the students. Students often attend (school and to their teachers) when their needs are met. Once they attend school, other needs that may not be so present like reading and writing and arithmetic can be successfully met. Therefore, we will continue to:
 - a. Provide a healthy breakfast and lunch program
 - i. Our breakfast and lunch program continues to offer, free of charge, healthy and nutritious options
 - b. Provide varied and daily cultural celebrations and ceremonies
 - i. We continue to offer students opportunities to be connected to their culture in many ways. We do daily Smudge, weekly circles, monthly celebrations and opportunities to participate in celebrations and ceremonies in a culturally-appropriate manner.

- c. Invite and use the expertise of elders to promote cultural awareness and pro- social skills
 - i. We continue to foster partnerships with local Elders and other community members to promote cultural awareness. We currently have an Elder and Stony language speaker who comes in once a week to work with our children.
- d. Work with other schools in partnerships in order to compare and study other cultures with aboriginal culture.
 - i. for the 2019/20 school year, these partnerships include, Academy at King Edward in Edmonton, Wildwood School in Grande Yellowhead SD, Suzuki Charter School in Edmonton and other schools within the Charter School society).
- e. Work with outside organizations to improve
 - i. We have worked with TAAPCS and Indspire. Through our involvement with Indspire we were selected to be part of a research project entitled *Nurturing Capacity: Building Community Success* conducted by Dr. Sean Lessard.
 - ii. We are in the second year of a partnership with HeartBeat Theatre out of Calgary where they do a 3 day residency to engage our students in performing arts. We also involve our partner schools.
 - iii. We are in the second year of a partnership with Spirit North which was started by former Olympian Becky Scott to introduce aboriginal students to cross country skiing. They come to the school over an 8 week period and supply all the equipment and instruction.
- f. Invite inspiring aboriginal artists to work with our students including:
 - i. Author David Bouchard visits us each year for a two-day residency and has for the past 7 years. He has established an ongoing relationship with our students and teachers.
 - ii. Aboriginal artists from the community who are willing to share their artistic expertise
 - iii. We invite artists from the local community to come in and work with our students (Terry Paskemin, Craig Lewis, etc.)
- g. Take students on varied fun but educational field trips including trips connected to positive consequences of higher learning
 - i. October 26th, 2018 field trip to the U of A, Resiliency Summit in Calgary in November 2018, Students in grades 3-6 participated in U-School (a week-long residency at the University of Alberta), we also engaged in various other field trips (Provincial Museum, Telus World of Science, etc).
- h. We will continue to report to parents but will add information such as how long our students are sleeping so they have opportunities to participate or be motivated to assist their child (to be shared with each student's report card)
 - i. We attempted to do this, but many students and families felt that it was a violation of their privacy. Also, as it was self-reported, the data was not always reliable. Instead of having students report their sleep, we spent a couple of months in Health classes addressing healthy sleep patterns, 7/10 students surveyed in an anonymous poll reported that they actively tried to get enough sleep, 5/10 reported that they believed they did get enough sleep 4 out of 5 school nights in a week.
- i. We will continue to promote a family type atmosphere among staff, students and parents;

- i. Nearly everyone who comes into our building comments on the strong feeling of caring and the sense that we are a family. Current and former students value the strong bonds that they create here.
 - j. In addition, develop formal/informal partnerships/ relationships with other schools that have developed expertise working with aboriginal students.
 - i. We have fostered partnerships with Wildwood School, Suzuki Charter School, Edmonton Public's Academy at King Edward, as well as sent two staff representatives to participate in the Literacy Alive project in Belize in November 2019.
- 3. Integrate as much as possible to save time and maintain focus on learning. For example, use math problems as a way of learning and practicing reading comprehension. Science and social studies classes can be integrated with LA classes with a few adjustments as this is an excellent time to use comprehension strategies to better understand the specific content.
 - a. We have always encouraged our staff to integrate subject areas and staff have continued to demonstrate their willingness and ability in this area.
- 4. Focus on hands on learning and engaging learning to increase focus and decrease distractions.
 - a. Instructional time, is a serious barrier so note taking should be replaced by graphic organizers such as Venn Diagrams and Fishbones. When appropriate, students can begin writing their own notes (LA) based on their organizers.
 - i. Implemented and reinforced throughout the school year. Use of graphic organizers is evident in each classroom.
 - b. Science should focus on experiments. Drawings, recording the experiment and results and conclusions should be emphasized in science – not note taking.
 - i. Evident in classrooms
 - c. Encourage oral discussion by using Tactics such as Think Pair Share (See Barrie Bennett) from Grade 1 to Grade 9.
 - i. Evident in classrooms
 - d. Use engaging tactics such as Concept Formation (Page 7, Instructional Strategies), Gallery Tour (Page 25), Placemat (P. 39) say switch (P. 49), Thumbs Up/down (P. 61).
 - i. Evident in classrooms
 - e. Use classifying (concept formation), analogies and storytelling as key elements of instruction.
 - i. Evident in classrooms...this is also a key strategy in PWIM (Picture Word Inductive Model) that is a literacy strategy that is widely employed in the school.
 - f. In mathematics, be hands on as much as possible using math manipulatives and focus on numeracy – especially place value, fractions, the basic operations and problem solving before attempting the rest of the curriculum. Integrate as much as possible. For example, have students graph their hours of sleep, completed assignments etc. or find averages using the data they are providing.
 - i. Evident in classrooms...however the student sleep tracking was not as successful as anticipated, for a variety of reasons. We still looked for opportunities to include real-life connections to Math and problem-solving.
- 5. Maintain and renew a focus on student literacy by:

- a. Engaging a literacy consultant to train new teachers in vocabulary acquisition (PWIM etc.) and comprehension strategies and provide help as needed throughout the year.
 - i. Fall 2017 and ongoing. PWIM-or variations on PWIM are evident in each classroom. Fluent PWIM users are helping staff who are not as familiar with the program. Students are becoming expert users of PWIM strategies (categorizing and comparing, based on shared attributes)
 - b. Ensuring that students are writing and reading and being read to at school every day. These activities can be integrated with all subjects to ensure efficient use of time and resources.
 - i. Evident in classrooms
 - c. Focusing on comprehensive reading programs that do not need a lot of texts like Reading power for Nonfiction and Reading Power for fiction to ensure that literacy skills are focused on each and every day.
 - i. Evident in classrooms...each teacher has (at least) a copy of Reading Power and implements the strategies in their Language Arts instruction
 - ii. These programs have been adapted for Division II/III when it makes sense to do so.
 - iii. We use Reading Power By Adrienne Gears, Graphic organizers (Barrie Bennet-fishbone, mind/concept-mapping and Venn Diagram) in every classroom so that by the time students have spent more than a couple of years with us, they have built a strong set of skills and strategies.
 - iv. Student choice motivates. Teachers choose materials and experiences based on student interest.
 - d. Be student focused and directed. For example, have students write a paragraph based on a prompt and then design lesson plans based on the students' needs as illustrated in their writing.
 - i. This has been done at grades 3 and up with some success.
6. Evaluation and consistent feedback is key for students and staff to not only make constructive changes but to know if and why they are becoming more successful. Often, just knowing can be motivational on its own. Therefore, as a staff we will:
- a. Focus on using rubrics as a key evaluation tool in order that students and staff have a clear idea of what success looks like. When appropriate, students can participate in their own evaluations potentially adding to their level of understanding.
 - i. Implemented at grades 3 and up
 - b. Continue to use formative and summative assessments so that evaluation motivates students to do their best,
 - i. Evident in all classrooms. Formative assessment and sharing the results with students has been exceptionally successful for our older students.
 - c. Use simple but effective methods of evaluation that are less time consuming but informative. For example, to test main idea have students draw a quick picture of the main idea to check focus and understanding.
 - i. Implemented at all grade levels
7. Implement a basic evaluation system with pre- and post-scores that will allow students and teachers to audit progress. This system must be easy to maintain, not take a lot of time and

possible to implement on a regular basis without fail. All results must be reported to the superintendent. Therefore, we will:

- a. Hire a consultant to test implement a one on one a pre- and post-reading test on a random 24 students. (6 Grades 1& 2 students, 6 Grades 3& 4 students, 6 Grades 4 & 5 students and 6 Grade 7, 8 & 9 students.)
 - i. Pre-test completed by October 11th, 2017. Post-test completed in-house May 2018. This was difficult because we had so much student turn-over throughout the year...slightly more than half of those students assessed in October were available for the post-test in May 2018. We attempted this again in Fall 2018 with a little more success at capturing results from the same students in May 2019. Although initial testing in 2017 indicated that most students were below grade level in terms of reading fluency and comprehension, every student was able to realize improvement by the post-test in May. We saw similar improvements in the following year.
 - ii. Have the ECS Teacher conduct an Alphabet test in the fall mid-year and spring for ECS students.
 1. October 2017, Late February 2018 and Late May 2018)- Ongoing-we have results from each year
- b. Have all teachers evaluate all their students as to their grade level by the end of October 2017 and at the end of May 2018. Use the following categories: S-GL (Severely Below Grade Level); -GL (Below Grade Level); GL (At Grade Level) and +GL (Above Grade Level)
 - i. We did this and tallied the results. By May 2018, 85% of students showed some improvement (they improved at least one level). When we gathered the results for the 2018/19 school year we saw 87% of students improving. While this type of evaluation is more subjective in nature, it is also based on student achievement in class.
- c. All students (who can write) will keep a folder of their writing. Have all students write a paragraph based on a prompt by the end of October 2017, February 2018 and in May 2018 and note progress.
 - i. Again, this proved to be difficult, due to student movement, however we have captured as much as possible.
- d. By November 1st, 2017 teachers as a group will design a simple grade-based math test focusing on numeracy, the four operations and problem solving. After the creation of the test, teachers will give the students a test based their past grade and by the end of May, 2018 they will assign a test based on the student's present grade. Results will be analyzed in June 2018 in order to influence the next year's planning. This strategy will continue in subsequent years and data will be collected, analyzed and reported back to the students and the community stakeholders.
 - i. We didn't do this for several reasons. 1. We wanted to align it to the Provincial Math Curriculum...which keeps changing 2. Student transitions made it impractical to assess growth (students who were with us and completed the test at the beginning of the year might not be with us for the post-test). At best the data could be formative. Students who joined us part way through the year would not complete the test upon arrival 3. Comparing a one-day snapshot to another one-day snapshot might not be the most effective way to assess growth. We attempted

- a Math Diagnostic Inventory but discovered that student's comprehension struggles impaired their ability to be independent at completing the test which skewed the results. When students had help to read the text within the text, they managed to score better. We are working at developing a diagnostic assessment that will suit our needs.
- e. In June 2018, note the degree of improvement and make a school summary. Analyze and make adjustments to the school focus based on the evaluation results and teacher reporting.
 - i. We did this in June of 2018 and June of 2019, with plans to continue at the end of year each year.
 - f. We have been keeping in-depth Fountas & Pinnell running records on all students and have data going back several years that shows an upward trend, especially in reading comprehension.
8. As a staff, we will focus on barriers that can be influenced by the school and that are measurable. We will develop baseline data and report to students and the school on the results. Measure on a regular basis to note changes. For example,
- a. Sleep deprivation is an important issue. Beginning in October 2017 we will record how many hours of sleep each student gets each day and see if we can make the number higher. Note: Once students are made aware; positive results often are the result. Fit Bit uses this concept to encourage us to exercise. This could be done as part of morning exercises in order to save time.
 - i. We did this for the duration of the 17/18 school year and found that it was not effective or accurate. Students didn't often report their sleep accurately, families found it to be invasive and some families actively encouraged their children to report false data...they were concerned it would be reported to social agencies. We decided instead to spend time actively educating students on the importance of good sleep habits and encourage them to limit screen time and adopt a regular bedtime. Our older students were then asked to write a sleep reflection in their daily journal, rating their quality of sleep (if not the duration) and record some factors that might have impacted their sleep. At the beginning and end of the year, students were asked to complete a questionnaire which included some questions about their sleep habits. Most students indicated that they had changed their sleep habits for the better.
 - b. Beginning in September 2017 we will track attendance weekly and report to students. (Div. III)
 - i. Done! Students were surprised that even missing one day a week had a significant impact on their attendance rates. While we typically have fairly high attendance rates overall, we saw improvements in our older students (the ones who had more control over whether they would attend or not).
 - c. Beginning in October 2017, we will track work completion as a class and report weekly
 - i. This was done...to an extent. It was much easier in upper grades to track this. It ended up being additional work that didn't really yield any remarkable data. Students who had breaks in their attendance, had incomplete work. Furthermore, they were unlikely to complete the work, even if given additional class time to do so.

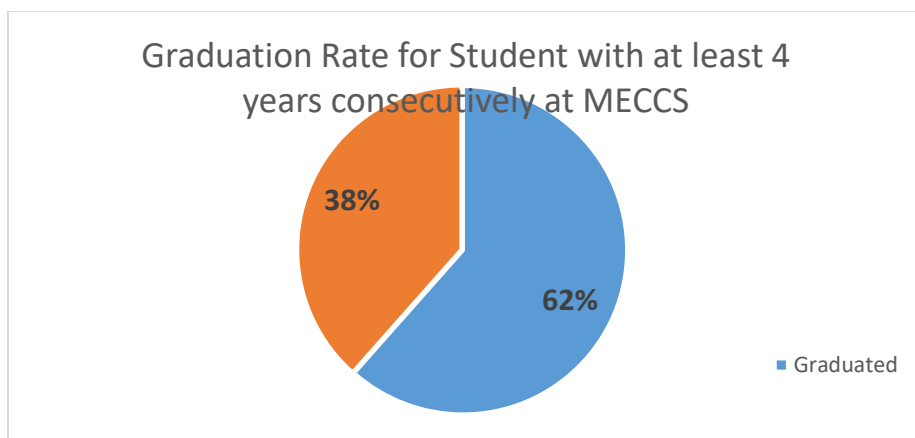
- d. In June 2018, note the degree of improvement and make a school wide chart. Analyze and make adjustments to the school focus based on the evaluation results and teacher reporting. *Note:* This could be done by division since different divisions may have different issues. We will implement one or two records at a time or teachers will be overwhelmed.
 - i. We did this in June 2018 and found that there were improvements in each area. At that time, we evaluated the processes that we had undertaken and made some changes. When we revisited our 2018/19 school year we found that we had, again, experienced improvements in all areas (some small, some significant).
- e. Commencing in October 2017 we will interview older students and ask what realistically would help them to be more successful. Where appropriate implement and evaluate.
 - i. Many of our older students could not answer this question so our first round of data from October 2017 was not helpful or terribly informative. We discovered that many of them did not know what “success” looked like so we had to break it down into smaller questions. First, we had to define “success” as; Academic Achievement, Engagement in the learning environment and Personal Happiness. In the 2018/19 school year we asked our grade 7, 8 & 9 students the following questions:
 1. What do you want to be doing after grade 12?
 - a. What kind of education do you think you need in order to be able to do that?
 2. On a scale of 1-5 (1 being easy, 5 being really difficult) what do you think of the following;
 - a. Adding/subtracting
 - b. Multiplication
 - c. Long Division
 - d. Fractions
 - e. Decimals
 - f. Reading *in language arts class
 - g. Writing an essay
 - h. Writing a letter
 - i. Reading socials studies textbook
 - j. Reading the science textbook
 - k. Keeping your homework organized
 3. When was the last time you remember really LOVING school...why?
 4. On a scale of 1-5 (1 being ‘a little’, 5 being ‘a lot’) how much do you think about other things (not school work related) while:
 - a. Your teacher is talking (teaching at the front of the room)
 - b. You are working on an independent task
 - c. You are working on a shared task (partner or group work)
 5. Have you even fallen asleep in class? If yes, approximately how many times in the last 2 weeks?
 6. Do you think that you regularly get enough sleep?
 - a. If you answered “No”, what factors have a negative impact on your ability to get enough sleep (eg: playing games, phone, family responsibilities, sports practices/games, etc.)

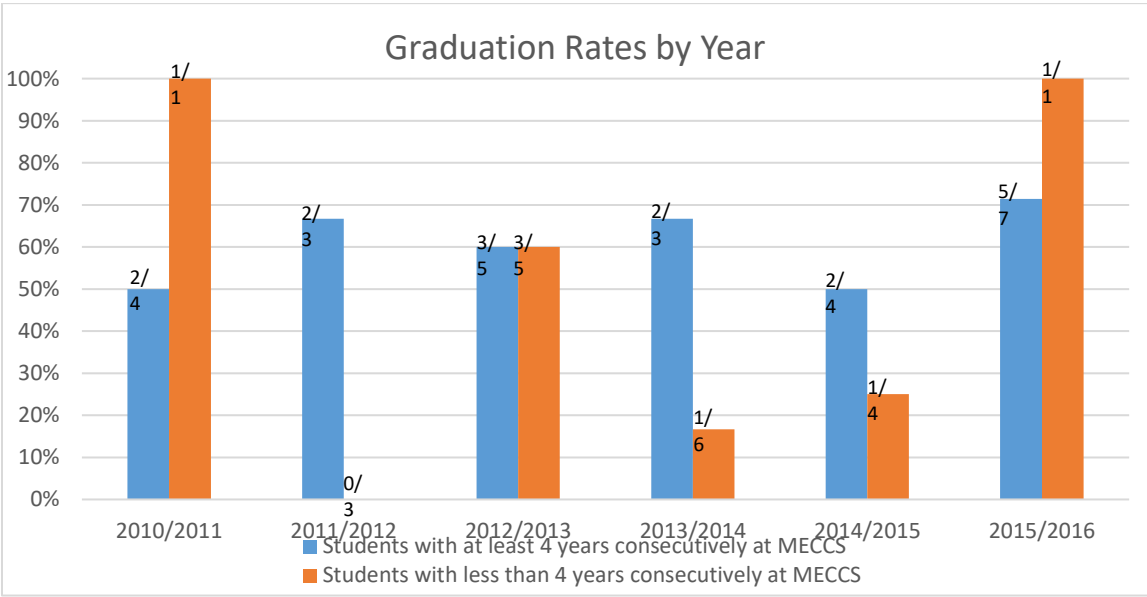
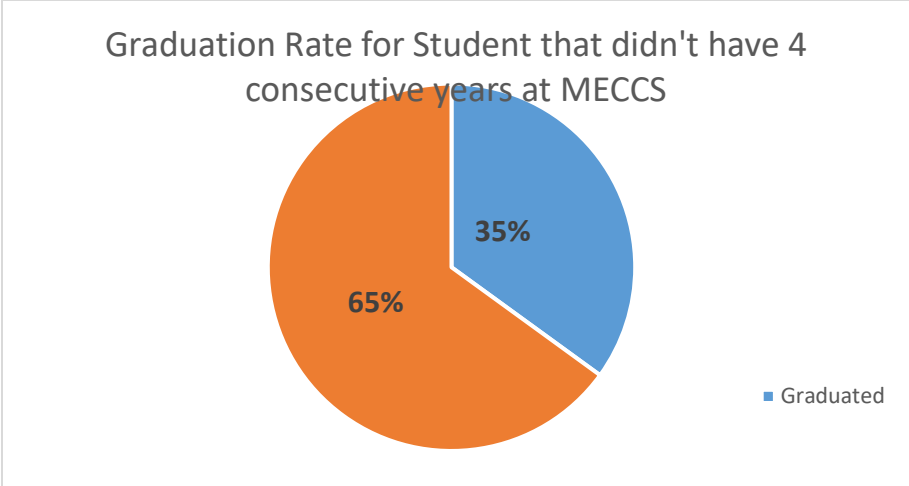
7. On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being not at all, 5 being extremely) how happy are you on any given day?
8. List three things in your life that make you happy.
9. List three things at school that make you happy.

After completing the questionnaire, the survey was put away and brought out again at the end of the school year. Students were asked if they would change any of their answers. Some did. Those who did change them, did so to the positive. (all changed answers were more positive than at the beginning of the year).

Although the general trend in our PAT results is encouraging, far fewer students achieve acceptable standard than the provincial average. This would be a troubling statistic if one were to look at it solely within this context. However, we continued to follow our students after they left us, and we discovered some encouraging data. In 2015/16 we sent a total of 7 students on to High School. Of those 7 students 5 graduated from High School this past June and we know that 4/5 of them have either been accepted and are attending at Post-Secondary or have attended a training program (such as vocational training and/or academic upgrading with the intent to gain entrance to a Post-Secondary institution). An interesting thing to note is that out of these 5 graduates, only one had managed to attain acceptable standard in their grade 9 PAT's. This leads one to believe that our student's success or lack of success with the grade 9 standardized testing is only one factor that impacts their ability to successfully complete High School. What is remarkable is that we find that when students attend MECCS for 4 or more consecutive years, they tend to have greater success at High School completion. We looked at 6 years of MECCS classes (from 2010-2016) and discovered that we had an average graduation rate of 50% but the graduation rate amongst students who had undertaken 4 or more consecutive years at MECCS increases to 61%.

Another significant factor in MECCS' success is the stability of our community of staff. We have struggled to retain teachers at the Junior High level, mainly due to the high work load of managing three grade levels in one class. Although our class sizes at each grade tend to be small, planning for and instructing three different grades is a significant challenge. Fortunately, we have managed to maintain stability in this regard over the past two years and see this as having a positive impact on our students.





Miscellaneous Notes in Support of the Application

Until this month (November 2019) Company of the Cross still holds the mortgage which is being paid by Friends of Mother Earth Education Foundation (FOMEF). In return for Alberta Education continuing to provide the \$350,000 lease support, Friends of MECCs Education Foundation has received or been promised private support in the form of \$100,000 from Ptarmigan Foundation, \$100,000 from Enbridge, \$150,000 from TransAlta for the 2020-21 term. Company of the Cross will waive the final \$1.2 million owed in the mortgage as their contribution. MECCS will continue to lease the school from FOMEF. It is important to note that this is contingent on Alberta Education following up on the commitment made by former Minister Eggen to provide that funding. We have been advised that it is in the current budget for lease support across the province and that charter schools are a priority but that it might take a few weeks for us to receive the funding.

It bears noting that the long-term, ongoing support from Richard Bird, Ptarmigan Foundation, TransAlta, Enbridge and the Company of the Cross is in no small part due to their hands-on

connection to the school and their belief in the work being done at MECCS.

Role of the Charter Board

The Board of Directors is responsible for the development of goals and policies to guide the provision of educational services to its students, in keeping with the requirements of government legislation, the values of the MECCS Charter and the interests of the parents.

General Areas of Responsibility

The Board is responsible to set priorities and policies to provide leadership and overall direction for MECCS.

The Board shall serve as an advocate of the charter schools and public education.

Specific Areas of Responsibility

1. Accountability to Provincial Government
 - 1.1 Act in accordance with all statutory requirements to implement provincial educational standards and policies.
 - 1.2 Perform Board functions required by governing legislation and existing Board policy.
2. Accountability to Community
 - 2.1 Proactively identify student needs and develop mechanisms to address those needs.
 - 2.2 Make decisions that reflect values outlined in the Charter and represent the interests of parents.
 - 2.3 Establish processes and provide opportunities for focused community input.
 - 2.4 Develop procedures for and hear appeals as required by statute and/or Board policy.
 - 2.5 Model a culture of respect and integrity.
3. Combined Annual Education Results Report and Education Plan
 - 3.1 Provide overall direction for MECCS by establishing mission, vision, strategic priorities and key results.
 - 3.2 Annually approve planning process and timelines.
 - 3.3 Identify Board priorities at the outset of the annual planning process.
 - 3.4 Annually approve *Combined Annual Education Results Report and Education Plan* for submission to Alberta Education by due date.
 - 3.5 Monitor progress toward the achievement of student outcomes and other desired results.
 - 3.6 Approve *Combined Annual Education Results Report and Education Plan* for distribution to public.
4. Policy
 - 4.1 Determine the goals and objectives MECCS wishes to pursue.
 - 4.2 Identify the manner in which the Board is to function.
 - 4.3 Monitor policy impact to determine if policy is producing the desired results.
 - 4.4 Solicit advice (from the Superintendent), then set the mandates for negotiations.
 - 4.5 Define responsibilities for the Superintendent.

5. Superintendent / Board Relations
 - 5.1 Select the Superintendent.
 - 5.2 Provide the Superintendent with clear corporate direction.
 - 5.3 Identify administrative authority, in writing, subject to provisions and restrictions in the School Act and the Charter School Regulations.
 - 5.4 Annually evaluate the Superintendent in regard to the Superintendent's job description and additional Board direction.
 - 5.5 Annually review compensation of Superintendent.
 - 5.6 Provide for Superintendent succession planning as required.

6. Political Advocacy
 - 6.1 Develop a yearly plan for advocacy including focus, key messages, relationships, and mechanisms.

7. Board Development
 - 7.1 Develop a yearly plan for Board/director development including increased knowledge of role, processes and issues to further the effective implementation of the Education Plan.
 - 7.2 Develop an annual work plan outlining its key activities along with appropriate timelines.

8. Fiscal Accountability
 - 8.1 Approve budget annually and ensure resources are allocated to achieve desired results.
 - 8.2 Receive Audit Report and ensure quality indicators are met.
 - 8.3 Monitor fiscal management of MECCS.
 - 8.4 Ratify Salary Agreement(s) with staff
 - 8.5 Approve the transfer of funds to capital reserves.
 - 8.6 Approve all contracts for goods and services with MECCS that exceed a value of \$10,000 unless such contracts follow explicitly from budget approval.

Selected Responsibilities

The Board shall:

1. Acquire and dispose of land and buildings as permitted by the School Act and regulations.
2. Approve school-year calendar.

3. Establish entrance ages for student admission.
4. Provide for recognition of students, staff and community.
5. Hear appeals of the Superintendent's decision on harassment complaints.
6. Approve instructional materials fees.
7. Approve new leases; such leases to include any provisions for the placement or modification of facilities by outside agencies.
8. Approve the appointment of a secretary-treasurer.

Charter Amendment and Dissolution

Amending the Charter

Any member of the Charter Board or the Society may request consideration of an amendment to the Charter. The Charter Board shall meet to consider the amendment request. The Charter Board's decision shall be communicated, in writing to the requesting member.

If the amendment proposal is accepted, the Charter Board shall by Special Resolution call a Special Meeting of the Society. At this meeting, the proposed amendment will either be approved or rejected by the Society members. Minor rewording of the amendment, which does not affect either the substance or intent of the amendment, may also be considered at this meeting.

The decision of the Society is final. If the amendment proposal is rejected, it may be discussed again after 1 year. If the proposed amendment(s) are approved by the Society, the Charter Board shall seek to obtain the necessary approval from the Minister of Education.

Minor Amendments

The Charter Board may, on its own authority, initiate and approve minor amendments which do not affect the substance or intent of the charter. Following Charter Board approval, the amendment shall be forwarded to the Minister of Education for final approval.

Process for Dissolution of the Charter

The Charter Board will supervise and have authority to conduct the winding up of the business and affairs of the school in the event that:

- a) Notice is received that the Charter has been repealed or the operation of the Charter school is terminated in accordance with legislation; or
- b) A motion for dissolution has been initiated by a resolution of the Board to that effect or by at least 60% of the Regular Members. Once the motion is initiated, a Special Meeting of the Society will be held in accordance with MECCS Bylaws. Unless due to extraordinary circumstances; this meeting must be held at least 90 days before the end of the school term to give the staff and students alike the needed time to make alternate arrangements for the forthcoming academic year.

Notification of Members and Staff

Within two weeks of the Board receiving notice that the Charter has been repealed or not renewed, the members/staff shall be notified either by way of a public meeting, written notice, or both, of the intent to close the school and begin the dissolution process.

Transfer of Students to Other Schools

Within two weeks of the Board receiving notice that the Charter has been repealed or not renewed, students will be notified of the dissolution of the school in order to allow them to take advantage of other educational alternatives. A list of programs with similar educational objectives and philosophies will be distributed to parents of all students.

Disposition of Assets

Any surplus that can be attributed to provincial funding will be returned to the Provincial Treasurer. Any assets acquired by purchase or donation by the school during the time of its existence will be sold and the proceeds used to pay off any outstanding debts. The remainder will

be donated to a charitable organization of similar aims and objectives chosen by the Board at the time of dissolution.

Disposition of Finances

Once all financial obligations have been discharged, a final audited set of financial statements will be prepared, all bank accounts will be closed and all signing authorities will be revoked. As a final act, the Board will complete a letter of authorization that will inform the Corporate Registry of the dissolution so that they in turn may delete the Society from the Registry. Sixty (60) days prior to dissolution, a letter of information will be sent to all financially interested parties informing them in advance of this decision.

Disposition of School and Student Records

Upon proceeding with the dissolution process as noted above, the Charter Board shall provide to each registered student a "transfer of records" form for their completion and return, providing details of the school to which they wish their records to be transferred.

The Charter Board shall remain responsible for the transfer of a student's records for a period not exceeding three (3) months from the date it provides the transfer form to a student. Any student records not requested for transfer at the expiration date shall be forwarded to the Minister of Education. All other school records will be forwarded to the office of the Minister of Education.

Appendix A- Letters of support from a former student, a parent and an Elder.

Appendix B- Research Study- Nurturing Capacity- Building Community Success