

FERRIS STATE UNIVERSITY

CHARTER SCHOOLS OFFICE

Review Type: Reauthorization

Academy Name: Michigan Connections Academy

Date(s): October 8, 2024

The Review occurred at MICA with 6 members on the Ferris State University Charter Schools Office (CSO) Review team: Chris Loiselle – Director, Peg Baker – Associate Director, Beth Taylor – School Support Specialist, Sharon Hopper – Compliance & Governance Specialist, Dr. Michele Siderman – Field Representative, and Jim Scholten – Reauthorization Review Chairperson. The team met with, and interviewed, multiple stakeholder groups, including the School Leadership Team, Governing Board members, teachers, and parents. The team was able to visit multiple “classroom” settings to observe teaching and learning. The team discussed with the building leader focused on current operations. We appreciate the open communication and transparency from the academy team.

Onsite Review Findings

Pillar #1: Academic Progress	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Are classroom interactions cooperative and conducive to learning? Is there a structure approach to managing student behavior throughout the school?○ Do teachers provide clear learning goals leading to purposeful instruction?○ Are a variety of instructional strategies materials used to meet diverse needs?○ Is the learning environment structured and time maximized for learning? Do leaders and teachers share the responsibility for creating a learning environment that supports all students?○ Are students given the opportunity to develop higher order thinking skills?○ Has the school identified growth initiatives that appropriately address the needs of their student population?○ Does the school prioritize continuous improvement and monitor progress toward goals?○ Is there evidence of a positive school climate focused on student learning?	
Areas of Strength	Opportunities for Growth
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● The school has added trauma and resiliency specialists who address student emotional needs and work to determine appropriate interventions and supports for each individual student.● The school implements a “power hour” and “reset” group to support student SEL needs as well as engagement and attendance.● The school wide approach to behavior management is focused on a preventative approach versus being reactive.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Continue to improve students' math growth and proficiency scores (NWEA and M-Step/PSAT/SAT) by 3 percent or higher each year as required by the contractual goals.● In addition, students taking the SAT are not meeting the contractual proficiency goal in math.● Continue to offer math professional development opportunities and support for all staff.

- **The school requires teachers to complete an Essential Standards Tracker that identifies the essential standards, Michigan standards, an example of rigor, the pre-requisite skills, when it will be taught, the common summative assessment and extension standards. Teachers then complete the tracker for each individual student identifying their level of mastery. All this helps the teachers to determine how to group students and invite them to live instruction and provide additional support as needed.**
- **The school involves the students in understanding their academic progress by speaking with their homeroom teacher bi-weekly discussing their progress.**
- **When students engage in live instruction, they must participate through a variety of resources which will show the teacher if the student understands the lesson's standard.**
- **The school provides several opportunities for students to engage in person through field trips once per month that are located around the state of Michigan to help to increase attendance and opportunities for all kids to attend.**
- **The school provides dual enrollment and accelerated course opportunities for students that are above grade level. There are also honors and AP courses available for high school students.**
- **The school has a tiered truancy process that identifies students who are not engaging and attempt to provide support early to prevent further loss of instruction. In addition, the school has developed relationships with multiple ISD's to pursue truancy filing as needed.**
- **The school has a well-established MICIP plan with two goals and multiple specific strategies to support and eventually meet them. MICIP meetings are held once per month and all teachers are invited to attend.**
- **The staff receives a variety of professional learning both internally and externally, with the internal being reported as being the most beneficial as it relates best to online programming.**
- **The school staff consistently talk about their mission and how they can put that into action and how that influences how they create their learning environments.**
- **Parents report have consistent access to their student's academic progress and allows them and their student to track the trends over time, including the time spent in class (specifically for secondary students).**

- **Continue to track longitudinal data trends to identify student retention and academic progress.**
- **Identify geographical pockets around the state for low performance and provide targeted support to increase student achievement.**
- **Continue to monitor and evaluate the caseload of the trauma and resiliency specialists to address student need.**
- **Consider increasing the frequency of contact with students to once a week instead of bi-weekly in math.**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents report the teachers are more than willing to spend as much individual and small group time as needed to support the academic needs of the individual learner and to also provide additional resources for the parents to use with their student to provide support. • The parents shared that they really appreciate the response time from the teachers when they reach out with questions/concerns. 	
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Pillar #2: Fiscal Solvency
 o Does the academy demonstrate fiscal responsibility, responsiveness, and sustainability?

Areas of Strength	Opportunities for Growth
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school and board have been fiscally responsible and have established a large fund balance so to be prepared for a potential reduction in funding for cyber schools. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue finding opportunities to invest in specific student support surrounding reading and math achievement, interventions, and progress supports given that the current fund balance is sufficient to protect against legislative funding cuts for several years. • Develop a more holistic strategy using your available surplus funds to support the academic improvement required in math and reading: i.e. professional development, materials and supplies, technology and contracted services. • Consider supplementing the field trip opportunities for all families with surplus funds.

Pillar #3: Operations
 o Do school leaders and members of the Board of Directors effectively manage the academy’s operations?
 o Are there systems that make the school sustainable, even with teacher or principal turnover?

Areas of Strength	Opportunities for Growth
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school does a wonderful job of finding and hiring staff that will best fit their environment, which results in high staff retention. • The school has established a strong mentoring program to assist/support new teachers. • The school collaborates with all staff to help create the processes used in the school that result in more buy-in and commitment to the school. • Systemically the school views the leadership team as their whole staff, versus a traditional hierarchy you may see in most schools. • The staff reports being highly appreciated by not just leadership but by all staff. This is especially helpful and important to new staff. • Parents feel the feedback they give through surveys is listened to and often put into place. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a succession plan for all school leadership positions. • Maintain and expand positive school culture activities and opportunities for all stakeholders. • Continue to address Special Education compliance issues that were reported by staff during the reauthorization review. • Continue to educate parents and guardians on the distinction between homeschooling and a public-school academy.

Pillar #4: Compliance & Governance

- Does the academy comply with all applicable laws and regulations?
- Does the academy comply with all contractual obligations as outlined in the charter contract?
- Does the Board of Directors provide competent stewardship and oversight of the academy?

Areas of Strength	Opportunities for Growth
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The board has a great deal of experience and brings different strengths to the board ● The board, ESP and school leadership have a positive and transparent relationship. ● The board received monthly detailed financial statements from the ESP. ● The board asks many questions from both school leadership and ESP at their meetings to understand the information being presented and to make well-informed decisions as it pertains to the needs of the students and staff. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Develop a succession plan for Board members. ● Monitor the on-time and accuracy of ESP Epicenter submissions. ● Improve the quality of the board meeting experience by limiting the number of different formats of engagement during a meeting or having appropriate technology for a smooth form of communication.

Contract Performance Report(s) Review and Financial Scorecard

Pillar	Areas of Strength	Opportunities for Growth
Pillar #1: Academic Progress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● MICA's "Growth Accountability Index Trend" exceeded the contractual goal with a score of 77.94. This continues to increase as scores were 62.65 in 2018/2019 and 63.46 in 2021-2022. ● MICA has met their CRD Achievement comparison target for MSTEP/PSAT8 in ELA proficiency with a score of 45% compared to 40%. ● MICA has met their SAT ELA proficiency target as well as met their CRD Achievement comparison target for SAT with a score of 55% compared to 49%. ● MICA met or exceeded their PSAT 9, PSAT 10, and SAT contractual targets in ELA. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Continue your efforts to meet the contractual goals in grades 2-8 in the following areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Reading & Math MSTEP/PSAT 8 growth goals ○ NWEA MAP Growth percentile goal in reading ○ MSTEP/PSAT8 CRD Proficiency Goal in math ● Continue your efforts to meet the contractual goals at the high school level in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Math growth and proficiency ○ SAT contractual goals in Math
Pillar #2: Fiscal Solvency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Extremely healthy fund balance (44% of revenue) ● All fiscal support indicators positive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Continuing fund balance increases (\$1.6MM added in 2023-24)

Pillar #3: Operations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reported Staff Retention is excellent • There are no staff shortages currently • No facility issues have been evident – nearly all staff work from home • Staff are properly certified • MUSIC insurance requirements are met • No State or ISD non-compliance notifications have been received by the CSO regarding the school • No parent complaints have been received regarding the school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See above Pillar #3 Operations
Pillar #4: Compliance & Governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See above Pillar #4 Compliance and Governance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue your efforts to meet the CSO expectation of 100% for on-time Epicenter submissions. For the past 3 years MICA had 85%, 93% and 95%. • Continue your efforts to meet the CSO expectation of 85% for board member attendance at board meetings. For the past 3 years MICA had 66%, 76% and 73%.

Signed James K. Schaller
CSO Review Chair

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CSO Director