



# THE MAINE EDUCATIONAL CENTER FOR THE DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING

GOVERNOR BAXTER SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF

One Mackworth Island, Falmouth, ME 04105

## Executive Director's Report October 7, 2021

Karen Hopkins  
*Executive Director*

As we move into the month of October I am filled with appreciation for our staff. They have come back to a new school year filled with challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic, a new structure to our organization and many new staff members. Our new Leadership Team and staff members have worked tirelessly to cover statewide needs with a goal of providing evidenced based early intervention and Deaf education to children and families.

Although we are fortunate to have all but one of our professional positions filled, we have several Ed Tech positions that remain open. Our staff have truly come together to support the needs in our site-based programs. Please help us spread the word.

This year we rolled out new committees. It is our hope that staff will feel involved and engaged in providing feedback and guidance in many areas. We are thankful to the many staff that have signed up to join the following committees: Liaison, Diversity, Website and Social Media, Wellness, Safety, and our 65<sup>th</sup> Birthday celebration planning committee!

We are bringing back our Deaf Council and have started a new ASL Team to guide our organization in looking at our Deaf Mentor Program, ASL family training opportunities, and staff ASL development. We are also looking forward to this team working collaboratively with our therapy team to develop evaluation processes for children. We are fortunate to have increased our number of Deaf and hard of hearing staff in the past year to provide this focus.

As our team shared last month, Maine is seeing a significant shortage of interpreters that is impacting the access needs of several students in our state. Last month we shared a temporary plan that was created by our interpreter coordinators, in collaboration with our Deaf staff, that would provide language facilitators in our site-based programs to support access needs. This plan involves mentorship and joint work with Deaf Teachers of the Deaf and Educational Technicians. We have worked closely with our Deaf staff to ensure they are integrally involved with the facilitators and our students are learning directly from Deaf staff.

We have begun a process of collaboration with MeAD, MeRID, USM, the Department of Education, and the licensure department, to explore alternatives for ensuring access for our students and explore ways to create pathways to interpreting licensure. MECDDHH/GBSD participated in a community forum recently that was a wonderful collaboration of over 40 participants. This shows the spirit of collaboration and willingness to come together as a community to solve challenges. We have a meeting scheduled for October 7th with the Education Committee of Maine's Commission for the Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Late Deafened to be facilitated by Tawny Holmes. This meeting will have participants from MECDDHH/GBSD, Maine DOE, the licensure department, Division of the Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Late Deafened, interpreting agencies and USM. The focus will be the Education Committee's five-year plan and how to incorporate a focus on educational interpreting and collaboration.

The Strategic Plan Ad Hoc Committee met recently and made a plan for next steps. MECDDHH/GBSD staff will have a strategic plan work session on October 8th. In this session the mission, vision, values and priorities will be reviewed and we will gather staff input on the 6 strategic priorities. We will do a similar process with a group of parents and the HRSA Grant team. Our hope is to gather data that will highlight various themes that will lead us in our writing of objectives and a timeline for the work.

As fall comes to Maine, I hope you can all enjoy the cooler air and vibrant colors of our beautiful state. Thank you all for your continued support and collaboration.

Warmly,  
Karen Hopkins, *Executive Director*



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## **Operations and Human Resource**

Cathy Murphy, *Director*

### **Business Office and Human Resources**

Lori Levesque, Payroll and Human Resource Specialist, has completed entering our staff data into the State of Maine's "NEO" system. The system tracks our number of FTE's, their positions, education and years of experience. I have completed the upload of financial Data (actual for 2021 and Budget for 2022) to Maine's NEO system. The actual financial files for 2021 have been approved, and the Budget numbers will be ready for approval once the September 2nd Board minutes are approved at this month's meeting.

Lori and I have been conducting ergonomic assessments of workspace for those employees who requested an assessment. Our representative from MEMIC (our Workers Comp insurance company) has been very helpful in providing excellent feedback for staff to make their workplace more comfortable. MEMIC will also be providing our itinerant staff and maintenance mechanics with a defensive driving training.

Our 457B representative, Gary Emery, was on site in early September to meet with staff and discuss their retirement plans and options. I received excellent feedback from all staff that Gary was very easy to talk with and provided excellent information which was easy to understand. I myself had a meeting with Gary and I concur. This will be a great benefit/resource for our employees moving forward.

As I reported last month DHHS is requiring us to collect vaccination rates for staff. While MECDDHH/GBSD collected the data, DHHS did not have MECDDHH/GBSD on the list in their web portal so I could not report for September. They will update their list so I can report in October. Our staff vaccination rate is currently 95%.

### **Facilities projects/improvement**

The State of Maine, Bureau of General Services, rejected the proposal by us and Portland Public Schools for the use of Carter Hall. The Bureau of General Services felt the money being invested by Portland Public Schools was not enough to make the building safe for students and staff. Based on the envelope assessment BGS suggested we address three areas in order to "mothball" Carter Hall. Those three areas are:

1. Roof – clear debris, continue to cut back overhanging trees/branches, clean drains, repair lap splices and perimeter tie in strip and termination bar
2. Masonry – cut back any vegetation near or around building
3. Air Quality and Humidity – continue mechanical dehumidification, remove and dispose bottom two feet of gypsum wallboard at perimeter walls.

Our employee safety committee will soon be reconvened and I have almost completed a Health and Safety plan for our facilities. One of the charges of the committee will be to review the Health and Safety plan and recommend changes. The rest of the goals/initiatives will be developed by the employees.

### **Technology projects/improvements**

Rich Foisy has been busy with the start of the school year. He has been getting new employees set up with technology and email. With the very big "staff shuffle" we did this summer in order to allow more distancing in offices, Rich has been very busy wiring, moving copiers, etc.

We are testing a new app on our personal phones called "net2phone" which allows us to access our work telephone on our personal phone. We can receive and make texts/calls using our "work phone line" on our personal phone. If this proves to be efficient/effective this will save us from having to buy separate cell phone lines and will save Rich from having to manage all the phone devices. Our intent would be to reimburse employees for a portion of the use of their personal phone which would still be less expensive than paying for a separate phone line each month.



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## Early Intervention and Family Services (EIFS)

Natalie Austin, *Director*

Fall is in the air here on Mackworth Island. The EIFS team has been taking full advantage of the beautiful weather and scenery as the leaves slowly turn to shades of red, orange, and yellow. Now that family visits are able to happen in person within a fresh air or community setting, many families have been coming on island to receive services. It has been wonderful to see so much life, laughter, and learning filling our spaces.

We are gearing up to start in-person and remote Parent Infant Toddler (PIT) groups to offer invaluable support and connections to our families. These groups will be offered through both our north and south teams to be able to provide opportunities for families across the state to be involved. We will also continue our parent support group meetings that were incredibly well received throughout the last year.

Our team, in addition to SEFS team members serving 3-5 year olds, will be receiving additional training through ODDACE (Outcomes and Developmental Data Assistance Center for EHDI Programs) which looks at assessment data for children who are DHH and will assist with our kindergarten readiness process. We look forward to our continued involvement in this program and subsequent data reporting to help guide our work in the coming years.

Continued work will be happening with the EIFS team through focused Professional Development related to the priorities laid out for MECDDH within our Strategic Plan. We started this conversation during the first week of school and look forward to revisiting these priorities to ensure we are maintaining forward motion in our work to address each area identified through our work with Innivee Strategies.

There is a crisp energy in the air as we work to schedule pumpkin patch gatherings, apple picking excursions, and other fairly fall activities. Here's to an amazing autumn!

## Statewide Education and Family Services (SEFS)

Kaitlyn Millen, *Director*

We had a wonderful start to the school year! For the first time since before programs were shut down due to the COVID-19 pandemic in March of 2020, Portland Public Schools and Brewer Community School returned to school for full school days in person five days per week at the start of this school year. It was such a joy for all of the students to finally be together for full days. At each program, strict precautions are still in place to prevent the spread of COVID-19. In addition to renewed energy with in-person learning, we have new lead teachers at East End Community School (EECS), Lyman Moore Middle School (LMMS), and Portland High School (PHS):

- EECS: Melanie Bowlus
- LMMS: Megan Garrity
- PHS: Shannon Winter

Along with our continuing Brewer and Preschool Lead Teachers, they have all done a fantastic job getting the school year started by bringing a lot of enthusiasm and creative lessons. They have each shared an update below.

## Mackworth Island Preschool

Steva Feir-Scarpelli, *Lead Teacher*

We currently have 20 students enrolled in our preschool program. 18 deaf and hard of hearing and 2 typical peers. The students have been busy getting to know their teachers and peers and learning the structure and routine of the program. The children are enjoying their time outside on the playground and their learning in the classrooms.





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## East End Community School (Elementary)

Melanie Bowlus, *Lead Teacher*

We are just one month into the new school year and the Baxter classroom at



EECS has hit the ground running! Students and teachers were all excited to return to school. Our primary focus these first few weeks has been to establish a daily structure. This helps students know what to expect while feeling secure in the predictability of routine. As students arrive, they gather in the Baxter classroom for breakfast and Morning Meeting. This is a loosely structured time for students to catch

up with friends, share thoughts and ideas, and start the day off on a positive note. At 8:00 mainstream students are dismissed to their classrooms, and the school day officially begins.



For the first six weeks of school, Baxter classroom is focusing on the concepts of community and citizenship. We are first exploring what it means to be a good citizen in our classroom, and then expanding that to broader concepts including our neighborhoods, our state, and our country.

Additionally, we are learning about character development. Each week a new character quality is introduced (i.e. hard working, responsible, giving, respectful) along with related stories, and we discuss ways to demonstrate these qualities.

For science, we have been watching Monarch caterpillars spin their chrysalis and are waiting for them to emerge as butterflies, as we review their life cycle.

In language arts, we have launched the Bedrock curriculum, a specially designed ELA curriculum for Deaf students. Students who have never before expressed their thoughts through writing are beginning to blossom as they explore these newly developed skills.

What is most looked forward to each week by students is “Reader’s Theater” which involves teachers and ed-techs working together to present “Charlotte’s Web.”



Students enjoy watching the story come to life through dramatic presentation and narration from the book.

Mainstream students continue to have regularly scheduled time with TOD’s, per their IEP requirements. IEP meetings and PD for staff are following safety protocols so are being conducted through Zoom.





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## Lyman Moore Middle School/Portland High School

Megan Garrity, *Lead Teacher*

Our program at Lyman Moore Middle School is off to a great start! This year, our program size has doubled in enrollment. We have eight students across all three grades (6th, 7th, and 8th). It has been incredible to see not only the academic growth in students but the opportunity for social-emotional growth amongst their Deaf and Hard of Hearing peers. It has been a great honor to take part in seeing our MECDHH/GBSD program come to life with so much vibrancy and action here at the middle school. It is a busy place, that is for sure!

Students are taking part in Rippleffect at Lyman Moore, which focuses on team-building opportunities and ways to challenge ourselves.

8th Grade - Learning how to apply physics to the design, construction, and testing of model sailboats. Self-identity and creating fun projects.

7th Grade - Learning how to measure corresponding parts of figures in scaled copies in math. They are also learning about the impact of invasive crabs on Maine tide pool ecosystems. They will be visiting Kettle Cove to discover more about their studies.

6th Grade - Learning about areas of different shapes and identifying states across the country.

Jonathan Connick, *ASL Teacher*

For ASL classes, it's been a good start with some bumps. It's the first time I'm teaching with all the students wearing face masks. It is challenging and it's extremely hard for me to know who is talking but I am still ironing out some wrinkles and it's improving. It's been positive from day one and I am still figuring out what works and what doesn't. I am enjoying the challenges and I think it will be fun this year. Teaching 6th, 7th, and 8th graders are varied and the 8th graders are now working on facial expressions with emotions. (We are doing this again since last year was remote learning and it's a refresher before moving on) The 6th and 7th graders are doing well, recently last week they had a quiz with good results. It should be an exciting year for the students and myself as well.

LMMS Team: Megan Garrity, Jon Connick, and Matt Welch.





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## Portland High School

Kevin Bohlin, *MS/HS South Coordinator*

Wow, summer is over and we are beginning the fall season with the turning of beautiful leaves. Welcome Shannon Winter, TOD! She is settling in nicely and has been full steam ahead since she has arrived!

On September 16, 2021 we had Deaf Tea Awards. We are proud to announce that one of our high school students received the award for Youth Citizenship by the Maine Deaf community. Congratulations to Marlaco Bethune!

We are also proud of Lucky Iraoya who made the Junior Varsity soccer team for Portland High school. He plays well with his teammates, and he scored his first goal ever and everyone was super excited for him!



Both Keyana Kassa and Lucky Iraoya have passed their Servesafe test in the food services program. Alicia

Pieper has been busy supporting our students in this program and is coming up with creative solutions to help students become more independent.



All the students met a local author who has released a book titled "Heaven's Ghost." The author, Anneke Barnard was a 2017 PHS graduate and a 2021 USM graduate. Her mother is a current teacher here at PHS. In Ms. Barnard's book, her main character is a teenage deaf boy who communicates with spirits. The students had a private meeting and reading with Ms. Barnard and were given a copy of the book, and each book was signed by Ms. Barnard.

[https://www.amazon.com/Heavens-Ghosts-Anneke-Lee-Barnard/dp/B09D6DGLLV/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?dchild=1&keywords=heaven%27s+ghosts&qid=1632851401&sr=8-1](https://www.amazon.com/Heavens-Ghosts-Anneke-Lee-Barnard/dp/B09D6DGLLV/ref=sr_1_1?dchild=1&keywords=heaven%27s+ghosts&qid=1632851401&sr=8-1)

Darleen Michalec (Hutchins) gave a presentation to Portland High School staff about Deaf Culture and best practices for working with our students. The presentation was well received and was dubbed by Rohan Henri (PHS teacher) "one of the best workshops I have been to in a long time".



## Public School Outreach , South Kids Like Me/Social Emotional Programs

Kevin Bohlin, *MS/HS South Coordinator*

The month of September was a whirlwind for *Public School Outreach* as the Teacher of the Deaf-Consultants are busy with coordinating services among school districts and families. Statewide, all of the students that PSO is currently serving in Southern Maine are in person. Our services are being provided both in person and through remote instruction as some students were able to work better via ZOOM/Google Meeting.

Our team is also ensuring that the new kindergarten students are transitioning well in the public schools while other students are adjusting well returning to in person learning. The *Kids Like Me* weekend program is in the process of returning during Winter 2022 and we have some exciting developments regarding a potential new partnership with a campground. Hopefully, at the next board meeting, we will have more information and a concrete schedule in place. As for weekly social emotional programs at a variety of public schools, this is currently on hold as we have short staffed due to heavy schedules for our Teachers of the Deaf to meet IEP needs statewide and a lot of schools are still being cautious about COVID transmission.



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## Brewer/North Programs

Donna Casavant, *North Coordinator*

Team North Part B Outreach has grown by three providers. We welcome Deb Myers, Leia Giovanella, and Christa Cook McKinney.

- Deb is a Teacher of the Deaf who will work part time in the Mid Coast area. She comes to us with experience as a certified educational interpreter, independent TOD, and VR counselor. She is working closely with Heather Kanumalla and Donna Casavant to learn the ropes of being an itinerant TOD. Welcome!
- Leia Giovanella is a TOD who will work in the southern Mid Coast area. She comes to us with experience as an itinerant TOD in Massachusetts. To learn the ropes she is working closely with Heather Kanumalla, Kirstan Banfield, and Donna Casavant. Welcome!
- Christa Cook McKinney is a Speech Language Pathologist who worked for some time in our preschool and then spent a few years as a community of practice therapist for ECFS. She now is taking on Part B SLP consultation and direct service with our 3-22 year old mainstream students. Welcome!
- Welcome also to Abby Kimball and Josh Gray as the program's new Educational Technicians.

We were sad that we were unable to fill Polly Earl's TOD position in Aroostook County. Donna, Deb, Taylor, and Leia are fulfilling needs in a virtual capacity. Thank you team, for your flexibility.

Itinerant TODs and SLPs are busy reconnecting with mainstream school teams, students and parents. It's a challenging time, but they manage to schedule visits and trainings while also updating paperwork and releases. Donna continues to work with Kim Spencer in referrals. The system continues to be refined and streamlined.

Donna continues to work with Margaret Airey in restructuring our Infinite Campus Student Information System. Stay tuned for exciting updates and next steps.

The Brewer Site-based program is busy and managing their first shift to remote learning through the beginning of October.

## Brewer Community School Site-based Program

Linda Koehler, *Lead Teacher*

The schedule and students are finally settling into routine but every day brings something new!

We have great teachers we're collaborating with this year. Our wonderful team has lots of opportunities to work our flexibility muscle



Linda Koehler



Abby Kimball



Taylor Markie

