

Annual Meeting



Bluffview
Montessori
School

1321 Gilmore Avenue
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May 11, 2023



Bluffview Montessori

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Agenda

1. Call to Order
2. Review and approve agenda
3. Review and approve May 12, 2022 Annual Meeting Minutes
4. Annual Reports:
 - a. Head of School: Henry Schantzen
 - b. Treasurer: Shelly Merchlewitz
 - c. Governance: Henry Schantzen
 - d. Human Resources: Renee Knutson
 - e. Building and Grounds: Henry Schantzen
 - f. Pedagogy: Meghan Booth
5. Announcement and introduction of elected Board of Directors members
6. Discuss and schedule a new meeting date
7. Open Forum
8. Adjourn



May 12, 2022 Annual Meeting Minutes

Agenda

1. Call to Order
2. Review and approve agenda
3. Review and approve May 12, 2021 Annual Meeting Minutes
4. Annual Reports:
 - a. Head of School: Henry Schantzen
 - b. Treasurer: Shelly Merchlewitz
 - c. Governance: Katie Kinneberg
 - d. Human Resources: Renee Knutson
 - e. Building and Grounds: Henry Schantzen
 - f. Pedagogy: Katie Kinneberg
5. Announcement and introduction of elected Board of Directors members
6. Discuss and schedule a new meeting date
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Board Members Present- Henry Schantzen, Ann-Marie Dunbar, Katie Kinneberg, Meghan Booth, Shelly Merchlewitz, Mariah White, Crystal Hegge

Board Members Absent:

Others in attendance: Cindy Smith

1- Meeting was called to order at 7:10 PM.

2- Shelly motioned, and Crystal seconded to approve agenda for May 12, 2022. The vote was unanimous.



3- Crystal motioned, Shelly seconded to approve board minutes from May 12, 2021. The vote was unanimous.

4- Annual Reports

- Head of School:
 - No questions were asked
- Treasurer:
 - Shelly discussed Clean audit
 - Fund from COVID relief is still available for programming
 - Summer school is schedule for July and will be funded through Federal funding
- Governance:
 - Katie discussed the board nominations and timeline.
- HR:
 - Henry discussed the policy reviews, updates, and changes.
 - Some current policies should be procedures in the handbook and will be added as the review process is completed.
- Building and Grounds:
 - Henry discussed current reconstruction as a result of the burst pipe.
 - IEA did a full HVAC system needs updating and is failing in a few areas.
 - All inspections are up to date.
- Pedagogy:
 - Katie discussed the science alignment for the new science standards
 - River Falls will be working with us for Science PD in the fall
 - Potential PD for paras through HVED in the fall
 - Huge growth in the second grade reading scores due to focused intervention at that grade level



5- Announcement and introduction of elected Board of Directors members

Ann-Marie announced that Katie will be continuing her role on the board as she ran unopposed.

6- Discuss new meeting date

June meeting moved to 6pm on Thursday the 9th.

7 - Open Forum

No comments

8-Meeting adjourned at 7:37 PM.



[Annual Reports](#)

[Head of School](#)

Bluffview Montessori Vision Statement

Empowered learners unfolding their full potential as whole and unique persons in a global community.

The Bluffview Montessori PBIS theme this year was built around a story that I believe Maria Montessori herself would have appreciated: *The Dot*, by Peter Reynolds. Dr. Montessori stated, “Imagination does not become great until human beings, given the courage and the strength, use it to create.” In *The Dot*, the teacher uses Montessori’s “courage and strength” concept to imagine a new world of confidence, opportunity, and creativity for her student. At Bluffview, the path to empowering children to unfold their creativity and imagination is rooted in aiding the students to develop their skills and self confidence. They undertake their daily work while always aiming at the true Montessori goals of independent thinking, learning, following their individual interests, and acting just as Vashti does in *The Dot*—“show me” and “just make a mark and see where it takes you.”

As you will see in the reports below, there is always a great deal of activity behind the scenes here at Bluffview. One area that I have truly enjoyed seeing this year is the number of afterschool offerings that our students have had access to. Parents, students, and staff have come together as leaders on several different occasions to create new learning opportunities for the children. Student-led clubs like the knitting club and Carry On, parent-led clubs like The Young Writers and math clubs, and staff-driven opportunities like the reading club, game club, archery, and running club have all been wonderful opportunities in their own unique ways. For each of these clubs to take place, someone had to be bold enough to step forward with an idea, a plan, and some expertise, and then make their mark by engaging the kids and seeing where it takes them. We are grateful to all the volunteers that have participated in expanding student opportunities at Bluffview.



As an institution, Bluffview staff is working to make some significant, impactful shifts and adaptations in the way we go about serving our students. HR continues to engage in ensuring that the school is compliant with the many rules, regulations, and laws that we are bound by through policy review. Pedagogy/leadership has taken some of that policy work and is running with it. This includes projects like our ongoing science curriculum alignment, slated to be completed next winter so that we can shift to English Language alignment concurrently. Physical Education and the arts will follow similar alignment work over the next year. On Friday, May 5th, we received notice that we received an arts curriculum alignment grant (through Perpich Center for the Arts) that will place us in a two-year cohort with other districts. Our BMS Non-Exclusionary Discipline team is reimagining and developing a larger framework regarding student discipline. Many schools in the state were directed to undertake this work; here at Bluffview, an ambitious team of our staff has chosen to make this a priority. There is also a huge shift taking place Minnesota-wide called MNMTSS (Minnesota Multi-Tiered Systems of Support). Bluffview has had an MTSS program for quite some time now, but the emphasis and details are changing. This will be a multi-year process, but the basic reworking of our committees, structures, and goals is well underway. Thanks to the support of HVED (our Ed. Cooperative) and a few more strong staff members, we are actually ahead of the curve on these plans. Unfortunately, the Finance Committee continues to fight an uphill battle to find any semblance of fiscal equity in the Minnesota charter school world. Insufficient revenue and common sense fiscal policies at the state level remain Bluffview's biggest challenges.

All that said, we will continue to move forward with the Bluffview vision at the forefront of our planning. The work of growing the school culture through engagement with our partners and stakeholders will continue to be a point of emphasis next year, as will a renewed push for fiscal equity for all charter schools. Thank you for your continued support and partnership!

Sincerely,

Henry Schantzen

Treasurer

Bluffview's financial management company remains BergankDV. In addition to compiling our monthly financial reports, creating budget projections, managing payroll and accounts payable, and working in an advisory position to help the Board make sound financial decisions for our school, they inform us of updates from the state and federal levels regarding revenues and legislative changes. They are also responsible for the clean audit issued to Bluffview by CliftonLarsonAllen (CLA) for FY 2022.

One of the primary functions of the Board of Directors is to ensure the financial health of the school while working to maintain a balanced budget. In FY 2022, Bluffview had a 39.5% fund balance for all funds. During FY 2023, BMS has a projected fund balance of 33.5% of our expenditures. We are obligated to have a fund balance of at least 20% and our policy states a minimum goal of a fund balance of 24%. We as a Board have a goal of 30%. The state's annual holdback of our funding is currently set at 10%. As of April 30th, we have received 102% of our FY 2021-22 holdback. The holdback has been as high as 40% back in FY 2012, which the state used to help balance its budget. One significant reason for maintaining a strong fund balance is to insulate the school against external influences as much as possible in times of financial shortfalls.

There are always factors that present challenges and benefits to the budget. Enrollment is the main source of the school's income (approximately 92%) and is one thing the Board looks at during each monthly meeting. This year our Average Daily Membership is currently at 212 students. For 2023-24, we have one opening in 1st grade and waitlists for grades Kindergarten, 3rd, 4th, 6th and 7th grade. Maintaining and increasing our enrollment continues to be a priority, especially for the Erdkinder and tuition-based preschool programs.

ESSER III funds from the American Rescue Plan have helped the school with increased costs, supplies, staffing shortages, and increased post-pandemic student needs such as Lexia Core Reading,

additional mental health supports, after school groups including the Carry On club, and three years of need-based summer school. COVID-related funds have also helped us to maintain a healthy fund balance. These funds also allowed the Board to issue stipends for the staff for the additional work performed in relation to COVID and a stipend for the COVID Coordinator position

Here are the COVID-related funds we have recieved:

- ESSER II in the amount of \$77,749; needs to be spent by September 2023.
- ESSER III in the amount of \$174,613.64 will need to be spent by September 2024.
- This year will be our third year of offering summer school. It has been completely funded through MDE Fin 163 for the last two summers. We still have Fin 163 funds in the amount of \$12,233.79 and Fin 161 funds in the amount of \$21,844.28 to cover the costs for this summer.

As a charter school, we have to lease our building so we were unable to use any of these federal funds for the maintenance of or improvement to our building.

The Friends of Bluffview were able to secure a \$500,000 matching grant and we have received approximately \$431,000 in commitments so far for the Bluffview Future Fund. We are completing year three of using funds from the anonymous donation of \$1 million to be paid out over five years. It has allowed us to increase the teacher salary base pay to \$30,900, a 15% increase for licensed teaching staff, as well as non-licensed staff salaries.

The BMS School Safety Grant from MDE allowed us to recover the costs of the Raptor System and its computer, FOB/Key card readers, and door electric locks.

We were able to offer scholarships for two Children's House families through our Gomez Endowment Fund.



Bluffview Montessori

The Board, along with our partners BerganKDV, the Minnesota Association of Charter Schools, and our Authorizer (Volunteers of America), continues to research and assess viable financial options for Bluffview, such as the Winona Foundation, Qcomp, and Winona County ARP funds. We have applied for Employee Retention Credit (ERC). We are always returning to our Vision for guidance as we work to provide the best possible services for our students and their families.

Sincerely,

Shelly Merchlewitz



Governance

The Governance Committee is responsible for:

- Promoting an active Board recruitment process for the school
- Orienting and mentoring new Board members
- Working with the Board Chair and Head of school to promote ongoing leadership and governance education and the continued growth of all Board members
- Periodically assessing processes for individual Board members and the Board as a whole
- Conducting the annual election of Directors and filling Board vacancies

Schedule for the 2023 elections

March 3	Call for nominations sent in Newsletter/RSS feed
March 24	Deadline for nominations to be returned to the office. Nominees are expected to attend the March 29 meeting at 3:00
March 29 @ 3:00	Candidates attend an orientation session and review committee candidate questionnaires with Governance Committee members - in Bluffview computer lab
March 31	Nominees announced in Bluffview newsletter/RSS feed
April 13	"Ballots" are distributed to school community members: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Will be done via Google survey• Paper ballots will be drafted and available upon request
May 1	Voting ends at 3:30 today. All digital or paper submissions must be submitted
May 5	Votes tallied and recorded
May 11	Elected Board members announced at Annual Meeting



The committee called for nominations for the Board elections on March 3rd. There were several seats up for election:.

- 3 Teacher Seats
 - 1 seat shall be a Montessori teacher, the other 2 may be any licensed BMS teacher.
- 1 Community member seat
- 1 Parent member seat

Initially there were 3 teacher nominations, 1 community member nomination, and 3 parent nominations. The 3 teachers and 1 community member ended up running unopposed and were therefore installed into the vacant seats.

The parent member seat had one parent withdraw their nomination, leaving 2 candidates. That seat was put out for vote as per the schedule above. The voting ended at 3:30 on 5/1/23, and the votes were given to Ruth Rourke and Renee Knutson to confirm the eligibility of the voters. Kim Bell (Governance Committee) and Ann-Marie Dunbar (Board Chair) also received the list of voters to ensure the process is followed appropriately. The results are the final page of this Annual Meeting Packet.

The new three-year term for the Board of Directors begins July 1, 2023.

Sincerely,

Henry Schantzen

Human Resources

The Human Resources Committee met monthly. The task from last year of going through a major policy review continued by reviewing and approving 46 more recommended policies. The major policy review was completed by September. However, as the Minnesota School Board Association (MSBA) continually updates policies to keep up to date with legal mandates, our policy review will be ongoing. We revised and approved approximately 50 policies. In addition, we decommissioned almost 20 policies. Most of the information from these policies have been moved to the family and/or staff handbooks.

Last summer, the committee utilized parts of the MSBA Model Student Handbook to update the family handbook. Even more will be utilized for the 2023-2024 family handbook. The committee also updated the staff handbook.

MSBA recently added a charter policy manual to reflect the differences between charter schools and traditional districts. Moving forward, we will utilize this manual to review and revise our current policies, being ever mindful of these differences, as well as to add a few more policies specific to charter schools.

A challenge to recruiting new staff has been, and will continue to be, that we do not offer health insurance, as we are not financially able to provide it. This is also a major factor in retaining staff.

Sincerely,

Renee Knutson

Building and Grounds

The Building and Grounds Committee is tasked with planning, discussing, and presenting recommendations to the Board of Directors on all Building and Grounds-related projects associated with Bluffview Montessori and the BMS Building Corporation. All three members of the BMS Building Corporation Board attend this committee's monthly meetings.

1. All inspections are up to date, including but not limited to:
 - a. Summit: fire suppression
 - b. Mississippi Welders: anse unit in the kitchen and fire extinguishers
 - c. Full fire marshall inspection: corrections were required and executed
 - d. Kitchen inspections: this led to upgrades and repairs on the walk-in cooler, a plan to reseal the delivery room floor, change the lights, and a few other small changes
 - e. Custom Alarm: alarm system
 - f. Preventative maintenance schedule for HVAC each fall and spring
2. The humidifiers that are part of the main building were a focal point all winter again, and it appears that we finally have them running correctly.
3. The dry suppression system continues to be an expensive hassle. There have been at least 2 sections of pipe replaced in the Erdkinder building now, and that suggests that the pipes in that building will have an ongoing need to be replaced moving forward.
4. Radon testing: The school contracted for radon testing this winter. If any room test results are greater than 2.0 pCi/L then more rooms must be tested. The actionable level is 4.0 pCi/L. The highest test value measured at BMS was 0.6 pCi/L.
5. Asbestos testing: The school was examined by IEA for asbestos. No confirmed asbestos-bearing products or concerns were reported. There is a list of “maybes” that includes all ceiling tiles (maybe because we don’t have the materials list they were made with, and apparently some ceiling tiles that



are imported from other countries may contain asbestos; therefore any work with them would trigger an inspection of tile samples). Ultimately, due to the modern age of the building and no known contamination, our need for ongoing third-year testing is now waived. Testing will be a part of any future construction products as required/deemed necessary.

6. The parking lot was sealed and repainted last summer after the sewer drain in the main entrance was cut out and repaired/replaced. Unfortunately the work done on the drain is now breaking for an unknown reason. The contractor has agreed to investigate and fix the issue(s).
7. After an incident on the playground, it was decided that we needed to just spend the money and get the camera system upgrades completed. We now have an extensive network of cameras that have been quite useful in several situations this year.
8. The School Safety Grant work was finally completed. This included adding a Raptor Technologies Visitor Management System for scanning drivers licenses of visitors. This is a security feature that is focused on vetting unknown individuals before they enter the main hallway. The shared window between the office and foyer had a pass through installed for that purpose. All exterior doors (but one storage door) had electronic locks with a FOB/card reader system installed which is an important security feature as it replaced the need to rely on keys for the doors. It is notable that 20 years worth of keys included an unknown number of them that were unaccounted for.
9. Further security, regarding lock downs: When blinds are drawn, the goal is to limit visibility from outside the classrooms. Fire code won't allow for affixing effective visibility deterrents to the doors, so we will have one way visibility window film applied to all appropriate doors during the upcoming summer. The contractor will be attending our next Building and Grounds meeting.
10. One other security concern is the visibility of the school yard from the Mall parking lot. We are working to make a plan to add a privacy fence along the east property line. Much work remains to be done there before we can proceed. The estimated cost of this fence installation is \$12K.

11. Construction: the good, the bad, and the delay. The inclusive bathroom build, due to several different circumstances, was completed in this fiscal year, rather than in the previous year, as planned. The result of that delay, along with the expenditures associated with the cameras and the Safety Grant, put us in a position where our Debt Service Coverage Ratio (we are required by our bond holders to maintain a certain amount of days of cash on hand/fund balance as well as maintain this ratio, which means we can only spend so much, and that a significant percentage of those expenditures must be on capital assets, or items that will have an ongoing capital value) was on the verge of noncompliance. This became an issue when we really dug into our plans for a garage and greenhouse. The garage bids, which we originally wanted to complete work on this fiscal year, came in much higher than anticipated (we expected around \$85K, but the lowest was \$119K), which put us in a position to reject all bids and make some changes, and now we are in the process of requesting new bids. Now that work is being pushed into next fiscal year (which starts July 1), which will mean that any greenhouse work will probably be delayed into the following year. So there has been an unfortunate domino effect here. The reality is that the greenhouse plan we originally wanted has proven to be very cost prohibitive, so we are working on plan B: a separate, free-standing greenhouse.
12. One other potential project is a small pavilion between the Children's House and Elementary playgrounds to give shade and an outdoor learning/working space. The projected cost is around \$28K, for which we will be seeking interested donors to help with the funding.
13. As of our April Financial Report, the BMS Building Corporation capital improvement fund has \$86,137.00 in it. It grows by \$25,000 each year, assuming it is not needed. The purpose of this fund is to have a reserve for large building projects. Last year the \$37,000 for boilers came out of this fund. Now the goal is to grow it to \$200,000 in the next 6 years which is the estimated timeline for a new roof on the original building. There may be a need for more than that as the HVAC system is in need of updates, and the most efficient way to do so may be to concurrently do the HVAC and roof



work. This is because components may have to be removed / installed via crane through a hole in the roof. Such plans remain to be determined. The primary goal is to build that fund so we don't have to take out a loan for the work.

14. The playgrounds are starting to show their age, and may be in need of upgrades in the next few years. This will be on the list of things to start planning for next school year.
15. Potential Legislation Alert: As it stands, charter schools may not own their own building, so we have this absurd workaround called the BMS Building Corporation that we manage and control, thereby allowing the school to lease the facility from it. This affords us a better lease rate and some local control. However, it appears that we may have an opportunity to finally right this outdated law during next year's legislative session. The ultimate goal with the MN Association of Charter Schools is to pass legislation that will have the state create a charter bonding agency (one benefit is a better interest rate), and allow us to replace the Building Corporation with direct ownership. We have received assurances that the Education Committees will at least give us an audience during next year's session to state our case.

Sincerely,

Henry Schantzen

Pedagogy

Building from the previous school year, Bluffview has continued the after school “Reading Club” that targets 2nd- and 3rd-grade students. The programs, Lexia and epic!, are computer-based and target the population of students identified with the most need for additional reading support due to lost educational time during the COVID pandemic. Also in continuation from the previous school year is work on the adoption of the new Minnesota Science Standards.

During the previous spring (2022), teachers were asked to compile a list of current lessons/materials related to science instruction. Building on this work, Bluffview hosted a Science PD facilitated by UW River Falls that focused on state standards and connecting them to Montessori Materials. Throughout the year grade level teams have been working on bundling standards into units, creating a broad pacing guide for when topics will be taught, and determining anchoring phenomena and guiding questions to be used across classrooms to help ensure consistency in science instruction. Due to the excessive snow days and lost workshop day for teachers, this work will conclude in the fall of 2023. It was determined that English Language Arts would be addressed next, since adoption of those updated standards comes before Math or Social Studies. Grade level teams will begin inventorying materials related to Language Arts Alignment in the Spring of 2024 in preparation for this work. Visual Arts and Physical Education will complete similar work with their standards in the upcoming year.

In addition to work on curriculum at Bluffview, five staff participated in Montessori certification programs. Staff as a whole completed Mandated Reporter Training and Cultural Competency training with a specific focus on how to address incidents between students when something derogatory has been said. Furthermore, many faculty took advantage of professional development opportunities outside of Bluffview, including attendance at the LaCrosse Montessori conference, subject-specific conferences for specialist teachers, and the AMS Montessori Conference in Boston.

Of note is the formation of two working groups: Minnesota Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MnMTSS) and Non-Exclusionary Discipline (NED). MnMTSS is a framework for enhancing the



implementation of evidence-based practices to achieve important outcomes for every student. The MnMTSS staff members have been attending training hosted by HVED in preparation for requirements coming from MDE. Recent work has focused on how to incorporate MnMTSS requirements into existing structures and committees at Bluffview. NED is a focus on limiting any type of school disciplinary action that removes or excludes students from their usual educational setting. The NED team has been attending training thanks to a grant from MDE with a focus on restorative practices. This group will attend a four-day intensive training in June and all staff will participate in a multi-day training in August around these practices. This training will be led by facilitators from a Montessori school that has implemented restorative practices successfully. The NED work will continue into next school year as the grant was intended to cover two school years.

Sincerely,

Meghan Booth

2023 Annual Meeting Elected Board Members

Three teacher seats were up for election. Three candidates ran for the positions, so the following will all be inserted into their seats as they ran unopposed:

- Meghan Booth
- Anna Aarre
- Shelly Merchlewitz

One Community member seat was up for election. One candidate ran unopposed and therefore will be inserted into that seat:

- Marcy Faircloth

One parent member seat was up for election. There were originally three nominations. One declined the nomination. Therefore, the candidates for the parent seat were:

- Jessica McIlrath
- Tihomir Bozadjiev

The parent member seat, as voted on by the Bluffview members by majority vote, will be filled by Jessica McIlrath:

- **Jessica McIlrath** received 32 of 60 votes
- Tihomir Bozadjiev received 28 of 60 votes