

Annual Meeting



Bluffview
Montessori
School

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May 12, 2021



Bluffview Montessori

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Agenda

1. Call to Order
2. Review and approve agenda
3. Review and approve May 13, 2020 Annual Meeting Minutes
4. Annual Reports:
 - a. Head of School: Henry Schantzen
 - b. Treasurer: Katie Kinneberg
 - c. Governance: Katie Kinneberg
 - d. Human Resources: Molly Leifeld
 - e. Building and Grounds: Henry Schantzen
 - f. Pedagogy: Katie Kinneberg
5. Announcement and introduction of elected Board of Directors members
6. Open Forum
7. Adjourn



Bluffview Montessori

May 13, 2020 Annual Meeting Minutes

Board Members Present- Erich Lippman, Molly Leifeld, Henry Schantzen, Ann-Marie Dunbar, Katie Kinneberg, Meghan Booth, Shelly Merchlewitz

Board Members Absent: Dan Kirk

Others in attendance: Jocylyn Poehler, Sherry Lohmeyer, Kelly Skillicorn, Linda Salzmann, Robyn Wangberg

1- Meeting was called to order at 6:03pm

2- Katie motioned, and Molly seconded to approve agenda for May 13, 2020. The vote was unanimous.

3- Katie motioned, and Molly seconded to approve board minutes from May 15, 2019. The vote was unanimous.

4- Annual Reports

- Head of School:
 - Focuses on distance learning. 98% attendance! Also, worker-childcare program is continuing. Averaging 252 meals/day in the lunch distribution program. Not sure about the fall.
- Treasurer:
 - Received a clean audit again. 28.7% fund balance. PPP loan/grant will help offset losses from preschool tuition lost. Full enrollment this year and next year suggests a positive outlook for our fund balance going forward, but the possibility of state holdbacks (currently at 10%) and uncertainty regarding the percentage of the state holdback next year have us exploring lines of credit to secure cash flow regardless of circumstance.
- Governance:
 - Worked to establish clear timelines for board elections in a particularly active season with several new board members. The committee effectively oversaw the process of electing new members.
- HR:



- Worked on reviewing and updating school policy. Of particular interest and emphasis was the Tuition Reimbursement Policy for Montessori training.
- Building and Grounds:
 - Preventive maintenance on the HVAC system, boiler, and dry suppression systems has taken up most of this committee's time and energy, but progress has been made in several areas. The problem of storage space persists because the lost capital from the COVID-19 crisis has prevented the garage plans from moving forward. However, existing storage has been reorganized and made more efficient. Plans for improvements made as a result of receiving the School Safety Grant are continuing apace.
- Pedagogy:
 - Continuing to work on staff development. The Professional Learning Communities are in their second year and are seeing success. The committee had to respond to MDE directives regarding distance learning and has been adapting to the ongoing COVID-19 crisis, including administering and reviewing the distance learning surveys.

5- Announcement and introduction of elected Board of Directors members

- Lori is retiring at the end of the year and will be missed dearly. A new assistant head of school, Sherry Lohmeyer, will be joining us this summer.
- Meghan Booth and Shelly Merchlewitz are returning as teacher members of the board. Ann-Marie Dunbar is returning as a parent member. Dan Kirk will be the community member.

6- No one spoke during Open Forum.

7-Meeting adjourned at 6:23 pm.



Bluffview Montessori Vision Statement

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

The Covid 19 pandemic has interrupted almost every aspect of “normalcy” in our lives. At this time last year we were in full distance learning with the state mandated shut down, and balancing a great deal of uncertainty. I cannot imagine that anyone associated with Bluffview, or any other school, didn’t find themselves in a position of making some strategic changes in their lives.

Our goal as a school was to continue to make decisions based on the best interest of all learners (Mission Statement) within the context of pre-existing and newly emerging roadblocks. With that in mind, we set out to plan for a great many contingencies, including full in-person learning, hybrid, full distance learning, and any internal combination of the three with respect to our mixed-age classrooms. We also tried to be sensitive to the needs of our families as these different formats would have significant impacts on their lives at home as well.

I recently read the following quote from Alain Dehaze-CEO of the [Adecco Group](#) (the world’s second largest HR provider): ***As the world we live in is so unpredictable, the ability to learn and to adapt to change is imperative, alongside creativity, problem-solving, and communication skills.***

Upon reading this, I turned to our Virtues Initiative documents and was surprised to notice the omission of one in particular: Adaptability. After all, isn’t our overarching Montessori goal to aid students in becoming independent learners that are actively building their skills for not only school, but as a foundation for their entire lives? If ever there was an opportunity to grow in mindset with a focus on adaptability both personally and organizationally, Covid presented that opportunity to all of us directly.



Over the course of this school year, we adapted to each and every learning model for every classroom level, in several different combinations, as new state guidelines were issued. Each format and associated change came with its own struggles. Internally, the biggest challenges included changing schedules each time we transitioned between modes, extra planning times for teachers working in a hybrid, unusual staff turnover at random times throughout the year, trying to keep kids meaningfully engaged while offsite, and the general increase in work for everyone. One of the biggest decisions we had to make was how to manage the distance learning opt-in for families in a way that would allow maximum flexibility for all different family structures and schedules without any reliable indication that any meaningful financial support was coming from the State or Federal Government to provide extra staff.

Throughout the year, a great many other complications were navigated including but limited to:

- facemasks (and other PPE), focus on good hand hygiene, physical distancing, hallways with only one direction of travel, alternate entrances to the building, and students heading directly to classrooms instead of starting the day in the gym, which necessitated changing most staff hours
- classrooms functioning as “pods” to minimize potential spread
- employing a full-time floating substitute teacher to help cover staffing needs
- purchase of
 - mobile hotspots to offer to families that had unreliable internet access
 - 99 new Chromebooks to make sure we could offer families devices in house and at home



- new staff laptops (25) to ensure good working technology (which allowed us to convert old laptops to Chromebook operating systems and donate them to families in need)
 - additional cleaning supplies, face masks, barriers, etc
 - additional furniture for some classrooms
- final upgrades to our internal wi-fi network, including new switches, upgraded access points, as well as additional access points to ensure a strong network
- staff and families learning new technology
- role shifting during transitions, in part to provide coverage for essential worker care, which we tried to expand as much as we could
- reorganization of classrooms and storage of supplies/shelves in the hallway and gym stage
- a change from classroom community supplies to individual supplies, including boxes for each student to keep supplies in
- cleaning throughout the building was increased: staff sprayed/sanitized 3 times per day in all common areas, and classrooms and classroom materials required extra cleaning as well
- only Children's House students ate lunch in the gym; all others ate in their classrooms, which necessitated extra staff and the purchase of rolling warmers. Volunteers were needed to help get meals to families not on campus.
- limited parent access to the building, meaning virtual conferences
- numerous new daily schedules were drafted: when one level would shift, all schedules were affected and therefore changed
- pretty much all aspects of classroom environments, from the freedom to move about to small group work, were affected as well

Amidst all that change and uncertainty, the one thing that I do hope came through as a constant was the sincere effort put forth by all school staff while focusing on the students and their



needs. To that effect, currently we are reviewing plans for a summer “lost learning time” program, we are offering staff and Erdkinder students voluntary Covid testing every other week, and we are strategizing a great many other plans with an eye on next year.

To wrap up the Covid piece, a thank you to the parents/guardians of the students is in order. The significance of the partnership between school and families cannot be overstated here. Families were frequently proactive, and voluntarily kept kids at home noting that they “would rather be safe than to possibly subject the classrooms to quarantines or other problems” in the event of a potential exposure. You, the parents, were frequently open, honest, and concerned enough about the good of the greater school community that you willingly made your own proactive choices to keep kids home if there was any doubt in most cases. I do know that this has not been an easy year for anyone, but the general sense of cooperation and understanding has been noticed and sincerely appreciated.

It may be hard to believe, but we did have some non-Covid related things happening this year as well. The most notable was the termination of our Authorizer by MDE this past summer. As a Charter School in Minnesota, we are obligated to have an oversight organization (an Authorizer) beyond the Minnesota Department of Education. Admin and the Board took a very detailed look at all the potential partners available to us, conducting research and interviews, examining financials, and exploring other avenues to try and find the right fit for Bluffview. Ultimately, we chose, applied to, and have been accepted by Volunteers of America as our new Authorizer. This relationship, while already well underway, will officially take effect on July 1, 2021. VOA has welcomed us with open arms and has been treating us as a member of their cohort for months now.

The other big ticket item is that we were very fortunate to receive a \$1M donation this past summer. It has been broken down into 5 equal installments over 5 years. The bulk of this money has been earmarked for staff compensation as we are always working against significant funding disparities when compared to traditional school districts. This is a major focal point for the school as



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we move forward over the next few years and implement plans to cut into that deficit in revenue. More to come on these plans later this year.

In closing, as we look to next school year, we still have a significant amount of uncertainty to navigate. We don't know about vaccinations for kids or the full efficacy of those vaccinations in adults yet. We don't know if masks will still be mandated or not, the labor intensive additional cleaning routines, classroom "pods", vocal music, or many of the other things that will dictate how we will start the new year. It is unclear what form of distance learning, e-learning, or other virtual learning will be required, restricted, or offered. My hope is that we can continue to build on our already strong foundation, a shared Bluffview community culture of student-centered learning and growth, supported by a strong partnership between the school and the families that choose to enroll with us.

Thank you to all involved in working through this challenging school year.

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 2019-2020.

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 2019-20, Bluffview had a 33.4% fund balance for all funds. During FY 2020-21, BMS currently has a fund balance of 35.7% 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%. 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. As a result of COVID-19 BMS saw some reduced enrollment school-wide with the majority being in the preschool program; this was about an \$88,000 loss. There were a variety of COVID funds to assist the school with the added costs, reduced revenue, payroll, and building improvements needed due to the COVID pandemic. Last year BMS received the PPP (Payroll Protection Program) loan which has been forgiven and does not need to be paid back. The CARES funds have also greatly helped to offset the loss incurred due to reduced enrollment and allow us to maintain a healthy fund balance.



“The **Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act**, passed on March 27, 2020, provides over \$2 trillion in federal economic relief to protect the American people from the public health and economic impacts of COVID-19. The CARES Act provides assistance for American workers, families, and small businesses, and preserves jobs for American industries.

This CARES funding includes an Education Stabilization Fund, which in turn contains two major sources of funding for schools: the Governor’s Emergency Education Relief (GEER) Fund and the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Fund. It also contains section 5001, the Coronavirus Relief Fund (CRF), which establishes \$150 billion in payments to state, local, and Tribal governments navigating the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.”

[\(https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/health/covid19/cares/\)](https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/health/covid19/cares/)

Here are the COVID-related funds we have recieved:

- The first round of GEER and ESSER was \$19,959 and has been spent.
- ESSER II is \$77,749 and needs to be spent by September 2023.
- ESSER III could be \$174,613.64 and would need to be spent by September 2024.
- CRF allocated \$53,246 to BMS to be used between July 1 and December 30, 2020 for operating costs and student, family, and staff support costs.

In addition to the COVID-related funds we have received, Bluffview brought in over \$8,000 in donations for the End of Year Campaign. The school also received an anonymous donation of 1 million dollars to be paid out over the next five years, allowing us to increase the teacher salary base pay to \$30,000, a 15% increase for licensed teaching staff, as well as non-licensed staff salaries by 7.5%, in accordance with the donor’s wishes.

We currently have three openings in kindergarten through grade seven for the 2021-22 school year. Projected preschool enrollment is currently at about a 50% increase over this year. Maintaining



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and increasing our enrollment where we can will continue to be a priority for BMS. Erdkinder and the tuition-based preschool are the focal points there.

The Board, along with our partners BerganKDV, the Minnesota Association of Charter Schools, and our Authorizer, VOA, continue to research and assess viable financial options for Bluffview, always returning to our Vision for guidance as we work to provide the best possible services for our students and their families.

Sincerely,

Katie Kinneberg



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.

The committee called for nominations for the Board election; there were two positions open.

One parent and one Montessori teacher member; we received one nominee for each spot. Crystal Hegge and Mariah White were the nominees for the two positions. New Board members will be effective July 1 and will need to attend 3 mandatory training sessions about charter school employment, laws, and finances through the Minnesota Association of Charter Schools.

Sincerely,

Katie Kinneberg



Human Resources

The Human Resources Committee did not formally meet this year because of our committee members' varying schedules during this Covid year. Henry worked on updating all staff job descriptions. The Board approved a temporary FFCRA Policy to be compliant with Covid related leave requirement-this policy expired Jan. 1, 2021. The BOD approved Policy 427: Grievance Process for Sexual Harassment Claims and is currently reviewing Policy 501: Enrollment, as it was flagged by MDE in our Change of Authorizer application. The Board is also reviewing Policy 703: Montessori Credential Reimbursement Policy, regarding funding teachers' Montessori training.

In the coming year and with BOD approval, we have drafted an HR Coordinator Job Description and internally hired a part-time HR Coordinator to lead the HR Committee's work in the future. This person will lead the HR committee, draft a cycle of Board Policy review, and help coordinate our membership in the MSBA for access to a full policy review among many other things. We will continue to organize and update policies and handbooks as we move forward.

Starting July 1, 2021 the school's TRA contribution will increase from 8.13% to 8.34%.

Sincerely,
Molly Leifeld



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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. During the summer of 2020, Bluffview contracted with IEA to conduct an occupancy audit, and to review our planning for the school year as it related to Covid preparations. They conducted an [occupancy study](#) so that we would be able to determine how many total people we were able to have in each area of the building. IEA also did a walkthrough of the building and discussed different mitigation measures. They also conducted a sanitation/cleaning audit, including the efficacy of any sprays to be used to eliminate Covid on surfaces.
2. The HVAC system seems to have run more efficiently this year, now that we have been on a semi-annual preventative maintenance schedule with Winona Heat and Vent. The north / south facing classrooms still heat/cool somewhat unevenly, especially on very sunny days. We are waiting for a bid to have the air handlers replaced in the main building. Our original hope was to use some of the federal Coronavirus related funds to do this. Unfortunately we will not be able to use the federal dollars for that purpose because, as a public charter school, we are not allowed to own our building. We lease it from the BMS Building Corporation.
3. The boilers in the main building were replaced (\$37K) with high efficiency units. The system also had chemical feeder pots installed. The Erdkinder building system had feeder pots installed as well. Having run for so long with untreated water, the units experience a shortened lifespan. With properly conditioned water moving forward, we hope to maximize the lifespan of both systems.
4. The dry suppression system seems to be holding up well. With all the new pipes, we will be adding a nitrogen-based compression system to it. This will reduce the oxygen in the pipes, and theoretically



lead to longer lifespans of the pipes and the entire system. The cost will be around \$11k. The goal is to complete this either in June or July, depending on our budget.

5. This year has led to an renewed interest in outdoor learning spaces. We have completed one space behind the library, designated for social and emotional learning. Now we are looking to add one or two other designated outdoor spaces.
6. The lead engineer from the city of Winona came in to observe the traffic flow in our parking lot. Unfortunately, we were unable to identify any simple structural fixes to the congestion. One observation that did come from a spring spent outside observing traffic is that we will be adding a sidewalk from the building all the way to the berm, in front of the 10-minute parking spots. It was observed that this is a significant issue that is fairly easy to fix after watching families walk through the parking lot, behind cars that are looking to pull out of the 10-minute parking spots.
7. Sidewalks in front of the building need to be “mudjacked” or the concrete needs to be broken out and replaced. The curb has become a tripping hazard. We will review in July.
8. The parking lot will probably be resurfaced and painted this summer as well.

Sincerely,

Henry Schantzen



Pedagogy

The pedagogy committee evaluated the needs of the staff in regards to the teacher evaluation process. We amended the timeline and requirements, added a couple of new peer evaluators, and discussed bringing a consultant in to complete the summative evaluation observations for the Montessori-trained teachers. This would allow Henry and Sherry time to complete the observations for the non-Montessori-trained teachers and have more time to focus on COVID-related tasks that arose this year. Mary Hallman was brought in to fill that role.

We also reviewed COVID learning models throughout the year and discussed benefits and concerns about moving from one particular model to another. The overall discussions focused on the need for students to be on-site as much as possible. COVID health and safety measures were always reviewed and discussed as well in an effort to ensure the well being of the entire Bluffview community.

We are on track to begin aligning science standards next school year and are in the process of arranging Trauma-Informed Practices professional development for the entire staff. This year's professional development days focused on allowing staff to ensure they had all they needed for their planning and their physical and virtual classrooms.

Sincerely,

Katie Kinneberg



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2021 Annual Meeting Elected Board Members

One Montessori teacher and one parent member seat were open for election as Erich Lippman and Molly Leifeld declined to run for re-election. We are very grateful for the time, service, and leadership that Erich and Molly have provided as Bluffview Board members. Thank you.

There was 1 nominee for each position:

- Mariah White will serve as a Montessori Teacher Board member, replacing Molly Leifeld.
- Crystal Hegge will serve as a Parent Board member, replacing Erich Lippman.

These elected positions are for 3-year terms.